

The More Excellent Way

Studies in 1 Corinthians 13

'And I will show you a still more excellent way.'

1 Corinthians 12:31

by

Steve Williams, M.Th., Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTION

I have personally known Steve Williams for a number of years. While working with the Robinson Church of Christ in Waco, TX, he made a trip with me to New Delhi, India where he conducted a gospel meeting for the local church. In addition, we have printed several of his books both here in the States and in India.

Coming originally from Huntsville, AL, Steve did his graduate work at Harding Graduate School, and then received his Ph.D. from Baylor University. He has preached for several congregations in Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, and Alabama. Presently he is teaching at International Bible College in Florence, Alabama.

This particular book was first printed in India. It is an excellent study, discussing in detail the love chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, and answering many false teachings on miracles, speaking in tongues, and the errors of the Charismatic Movement. Because of the prevalence of these doctrines in the U.S.A., we decided to print it here as well. It will not only be used among American Christians, but will also be sent to many others in countries around the world.

You will find Steve's writings to be informative, inspirational, and scriptural. It will be useful for personal study, as a class book, and for sharing with your religious friends. We are confident THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY will bear good fruit wherever it goes.

I am therefore happy to commend Bro. Steve Williams and his book to all serious students of God's word.

J.C. Choate
Winona, MS 38967
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THE LOVE CHAPTER

1 Corinthians 13

Christianity is a religion of love. The life and death of Jesus Christ are the greatest love story ever told. The Bible is a book of love, and in the Bible there is a lovely chapter which we can appropriately call "The Love Chapter." It has been called "one of the most sublime passages of the entire Bible." Another writer says, "It is one of Paul's finest moments; indeed, let the interpreter beware lest too much analysis detract from its sheer beauty and power."¹ Adolf Harnack, a famous German historian, called 1 Corinthians 13 "the greatest, strongest, deepest thing Paul ever wrote."² Zodhiates declared, "Love has probably stimulated more songs than any other subject. But there has never been a greater song on love than that written by Paul in I Corinthians 13."³ Robertson and Plummer contend that "its literary and rhythmical beauty . . . places it among the finest passages in the sacred, or, indeed, in any writings."⁴ It is a literary masterpiece, and it is the inspired word of God in written form (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Well did Farrar say, "This chapter has been in all ages the object of the special admiration of the Church. Would that it had received in all ages the loftier and more valuable admiration which would have been expressed by an acceptance of its lessons!"

Love is a central virtue and motivating force in

commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 Jn. 5:3).

Christian love has its source in the love of God. "We love, because he first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19). "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 Jn. 4:11). "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us" (Rom. 5:5). Paul told one church, "But concerning love of the brethren you have no need to have any one write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another" (1 Thess. 4:9). The love of God is also the pattern or example by which Christian love should be shaped. Frequently in the Scriptures we are told to love "as" Christ has loved us (Eph. 5:25). Christ's love gives definition and content to love. "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2).

On one occasion Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment, namely, to "love one another." This commandment was not really new, but a measure or dimension was present which was entirely new. Jesus said, "Love one another; even as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:34). Jesus redefined and outlined love and made the command to love new. He founded a new way of life, the Christian way, based on this new commandment of love.

There are many definitions of love. The English word "love" is used in numerous ways. In Greek there are several different words for love. The key word for love in the New Testament is *agape*. This type of love is an unselfish love where the lover seeks what is best for the one toward whom the love is directed. *Agape* love is a love that gives. There are several characteristics of

Another writer has shown that the love Paul enumerates in 1 Corinthians 13 is directed in particular at the Corinthians who were overemphasizing the ability to speak in tongues.⁷ The following chart summarizes his conclusions:

Love is	Tongue speakers were
Long-suffering	Impatient
Kind	Unmerciful toward those unable to speak in tongues whom they deemed inferior
Not jealous	Envious; desiring to be superior
Not boastful	Boastful of their gifts
Not puffed up	Full of pride and arrogance
Acts not unbecomingly	Loses control and moral restraint
Seeks not its own	Seeks honor of men
Not provoked	Cannot stand criticism; touchy
Takes no account of evil	Selfishly exalts himself above all others
Rejoices not in unrighteousness, but rejoices in the truth	Rejoices in ability to speak in tongues, which may reveal no truth or teach anything

5. George F. Thomas, **Christian Ethics and Moral Philosophy** (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 48-50.
6. Charles Hodge, **A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians**, reprint edition (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 269.
7. Ira Jay Martin, "1 Corinthians 13 Interpreted by Its Context," **Journal of Bible and Religion** 18 (April 1950): 101-05.

Chapter 2

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The church in Corinth was divided. Part of the problem was the arrogance of some Christians concerning spiritual gifts. Some Christians felt they were superior or better than other Christians because they could speak in tongues. Paul does not say that speaking in tongues is wrong, but he does say it is the least of the spiritual gifts. He does predict that tongues and other miraculous gifts will cease, which they did toward the end of the first century. Most importantly for our discussion here, Paul says speaking in tongues is useless unless one has love. Paul is not merely saying that eloquence without love is worthless, although that is certainly true. The tongues here refer to the miraculous ability to speak in another language, which some early Christians were given by God.

Even if Christians could talk in the language of angels, if they did not have love, Paul says they are no better than "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." The

most exalted speech in the world is nothing unless the speaker has love. Without love the greatest words are without value, a senseless sound. The illustration Paul gives here might refer to several things. The "noisy gong or clanging cymbal" might refer to the noise made by such instruments in pagan rituals and processions in Corinth by cults like those of Dionysus and Cybele. Anything associated with pagan rituals was empty and worthless.

The gong and cymbal may refer to children's toys which were used to ward off evil. This also was silly and empty to Paul. Cymbals are frequently associated with Jewish worship which was also vain. Some bronze instruments were known in the ancient world which were used to make noise like thunder at plays. Armies sometimes used these devices to make loud, frightening noises in an attempt to scare an enemy during battle. These noises were loud, but mostly empty of meaning, as were tongues if not spoken in love.

One intriguing suggestion to explain Paul's metaphor "noisy gong" or "sounding brass" has to do with an acoustical device common in the first century world around Corinth. The word for "gong" is never used for a musical instrument, but it does refer to large jars placed at the back of theaters. These devices were used to project the songs or speech of actors out toward the audience. By analogy speaking in a tongue without love would be like a sound coming from a lifeless vessel. The sound might be the wonderful singing of an actor or a poetic line from a theatrical production, but it came from a vessel that was dead. Likewise, a tongue might be

wonderful to hear, but if the speaker, the vessel, had not been made alive by love, it was a useless sound. Plato once referred to a bronze vase echoing on and on, as do some empty-headed speakers.¹

It has also been argued that the second instrument mentioned by Paul, a clanging cymbal, was not undesirable, but pleasant music to the ears of ancient people.² If the "or" of 1 Corinthians 13:1 is translated as "rather than," then Paul is drawing a contrast. It would read like this: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I am a dingy piece of bronze rather than a joyfully sounding cymbal."³ The meaning of 1 Corinthians 13:1 according to this translation is: "Speaking without love makes the same impression as performing on a hunk of bronze, whereas speech which bears love can touch lives as effectively as a sweetly sounding cymbal."⁴ Whatever Paul's original metaphor was, his key idea is clear. The greatest of words are worthless noise unless they are spoken in love.

Paul continues to say that even if a person understands mysteries or has knowledge that others do not have, if that person does not have love, that person is nothing. Some of the Corinthians believed they were smarter than their brethren. This arrogance was causing weaker brothers to stumble. Paul is striking at their pride and trying to lead them toward humility and love (1 Cor. 8:1-13).

Paul even says that great faith, the kind of faith that can move mountains (Mt. 17:20; 21:21), is nothing without love. Many believers teach that salvation is by

faith alone or faith only. We are saved only by faith, but it is not faith alone that saves us. James shows that faith must be active in obedience or else it is dead and ineffective in our salvation (Jas. 2:14-26). Paul likewise teaches that faith alone is not sufficient. He says that great faith is nothing if it is not coupled with love. Justification is by faith, but not by faith alone, as shown even by the apostle Paul.

Charity or philanthropy is commendable, but Paul says one may give away everything he owns and gain nothing if he does not have love. When we give to the poor or do good deeds, it must be because of love and in love that we do this. Ananias and Sapphira gave a tremendous amount of money to the early church, but they did not do it out of love. They did it to receive the praise of men. Their gift was made from selfish motives. They were punished for their sin (Acts 5:1-11). On the other hand, Barnabas sold some land and gave the money to the church to help the poor, and he was praised for this. Obviously Barnabas made his gift in love (Acts 4:32-37).

According to one textual or manuscript tradition, Paul even says someone can give his body to be burned and gain nothing if it is not done in love. Merely suffering for a cause does not guarantee that one's heart has been changed by love. Making great sacrifices out of egotism, exhibitionism, or selfish display negates the act. Paul is discouraging the Corinthians from being absorbed in themselves and doing things for personal credit, glory, merit, or reward.

There was a well-known incident in the ancient world

of which Paul may have been aware. An Indian man living in the Roman Empire had lived a happy life, but he was afraid that some future tragedies might lead him to unhappiness. He coated his body with oil and jumped on a pyre and was burned to death. On his tomb the following words were inscribed: "Here lies Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargosa, who immortalized himself in accordance with the ancestral customs of Indians" (Strabo, Geog. 15.1.73; Loeb edition). This man gave his body to be burned, but it was done without the noble motivation of love.

Paul also might have in mind Christian martyrdom by fire. Some of the Jews had been martyred in this manner in the past. In about ten years the Roman emperor Nero would murder many Christians by crucifying them and burning them while they hung on crosses. If a Christian sought after martyrdom in hopes of vain glory, to make a name for himself, Paul would say it was worthless. Similarly some Jews had sought martyrdom by fire, a fate they could have avoided.

Other manuscripts say, "If I deliver my body that I may glory, but have not love, I gain nothing." (The difference in this reading and the one about giving one's body to be burned is very slight in the Greek, namely *kauxesomai* or *kauthesomai*). A custom developed later in the history of the church where Christians would sometimes sell themselves into slavery in order to provide money for the poor or to buy another Christian out of slavery. If Paul refers to this, he says that even this great sacrificial act is worth nothing unless it is done in love. He might be speaking in general of bodily

or physical sufferings for Christ, something Paul himself had endured (2 Cor. 11:23-29). Paul is speaking of some sort of self-sacrifice,—that is certain. Self-sacrifice without love is worthless!

The various items Paul mentions in these verses were not bad. Speaking in tongues and prophecies were desirable for first century Christians (1 Cor. 14:1-2). Tongues in particular were highly valued by the church at Corinth. Knowledge was not bad. Faith and giving to the poor were commendable. The problem was the absence of love. If a person did all of these things, but his or her life had not been given to love, that life rated a zero.

To put it in modern terms, if you take the Lord's Supper every Sunday but have no love, you gain nothing. If you have proper church organization but have no love, you profit nothing. If you practice baptism by immersion for the remission of sins but have no love, you benefit nothing. Do not get me wrong. All of these last items are very important. Essential to all of these and to everything else associated with being a Christian is love. "Without love you have a soulless Christianity and only the shell of faith. . . . Lack of it leaves your abilities and labors a dead thing."⁵ "Christian Love is that something without which everything else is nothing."⁶

1. William Harris, "Sounding Brass' and Hellenistic Technology," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8 (January-February 1982): 38-41; and William W. Klein, "Noisy Gong or Acoustic Vase?" *A Note On 1 Corinthians 13.1*," *New Testament Studies* 32 (April 1986): 286-89.

2. Todd K. Sanders, "A New Approach to 1 Corinthians 13.1," *New Testament Studies* 36 (October 1990): 614-18. Compare "or" (en) in Luke 15:7 and 1 Corinthians 14:19 where it means "rather than."
3. *Ibid.*, p. 617.
4. *Ibid.*
5. George Klein, "Christian Love According to 1 Cor. 13," *Concordia* 30 (June 1959): 438.
6. Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer. *First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians* (International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 286.

WHAT IS LOVE?

"Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

What is Christian love? Paul does not give a strict definition of it in his great love chapter, but he describes how love acts. He begins by saying that love is patient and kind. To act lovingly, one must be patient with others. The word here (*makrothumeo*) means to be patient or forbearing. This is not indulgence. It does not mean that we should gloss over sin and ignore it, but rather we should be patient with others and give them an opportunity to repent.

It is easy for human beings to be patient with themselves, but not with other people. We expect other people to give us an extra chance, to make an exception for us, to read our mind and know our motives, and to be easy with us in judgment. Are we that patient with other people? The Corinthians were very impatient with one another, so they needed this admonition from Paul.

A missionary once went to a village in Nigeria, Africa, to preach. He had made an appointment with the people at 4:00. At 4:00 no one had shown up to hear him preach

the gospel. At 4:30 still no one had arrived. He finally asked and found that most people were gone to the market. This missionary did not realize that these village people did not have watches. They did not worry about time like city people do. He should have known that they would have returned from market soon and gladly heard him. Due to impatience, the missionary left the village. He felt insulted. He said to himself, "I came all the way across an ocean and went to great trouble to come preach to these people. They should at least have the courtesy to listen to me on time."

As he traveled home, he felt a little ashamed of himself. He began to think about how far Christ had come,—all the way from heaven to earth. He thought about how patient Christ was with his own weaknesses and faults. In humility the missionary went back to the village. In time, after teaching them on several occasions, he was able to see the church established in that village. He was patient with them which was the loving thing to be. Elsewhere Paul teaches us to "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Thes. 5:14).

There was a young man who wanted to become a missionary. He had to be examined and tested by those who were going to finance his mission efforts. One of those men requested the prospective missionary to come to his house at 6:00 in the morning. He had him wait in his study until 10:00 that morning. Finally after four hours of waiting, he walked into the room where the young man was patiently waiting. He proceeded to ask him very simple questions that would insult most

people: "Can you spell? Can you spell 'God?' Can you write your name? Do you know what your name is?" After several similar questions this man gave the prospective missionary a good recommendation. He reported: "He will do. I tried his patience for four hours, and he did not break down. I then insulted him, and he did not lose his temper. He will do." This young man had shown great poise and self-control. He would be able to show Christian love through being patient with others.

One time a preacher lived next to a man who was easily angered. The preacher wanted to hang up a bucket or a dipper in his yard, so he drove a nail in the fence that separated the two yards. He did not realize that the nail was too long and it stuck out the other side of the fence. One day he saw that his neighbor had hit the exposed end of the nail extremely hard with a hammer. This not only knocked the nail out of the fence, it knocked the bucket flying through the air. The first inclination of most people would be to rush out and start an argument. The preacher decided that would accomplish little, so he was patient and said nothing at first. Then the preacher decided he would go speak to the man. Instead of arousing the other man's anger, the preacher said: "It was thoughtless of me to drive that nail through your side of the fence. I ask your pardon." Instead of an argument, the preacher got a handshake from the man who said: "Let us not say anything more about it." Patience can not only defuse an argument, it can prevent one from ever taking place.

Paul also says that love is "kind" (1 Cor. 13:4). Love acts kindly. The Greek word here (*chresteuomai*) means

to be kind, loving, and merciful. The root from which the word "kind" is derived is *chrestos* which means "good, worthy, or excellent." That word sounds very much like Christ or Christianity. Early Christians made note of that similarity and said that Christ is *chrestos* and Christians are *chrestoi*, that is, good or worthy (Justin, Apology 4. 1). In a similar way we can say that Christ is kind and Christians should be also.

A preacher once told of how he won a family to Christ by a smile of kindness. Every day he passed by a certain house, and he noticed a small child looking out of the window most of the time. He nodded or waved and smiled at the child. The child seemed to like that. The next day, the child was watching again as he passed by so he nodded and smiled. The next time it happened, there were two children watching. Soon there were three children watching. Hundreds of strangers were passing by and none gave the children any attention except for this kind stranger. Soon a grown woman, obviously the mother of the children, watched with them from the window. The family noticed that this smiling stranger always carried a Bible with him, so they followed him to the church building one Sunday. Soon the whole family was in regular attendance—all due to a smile of kindness.

A very beautiful story tells of the kindness of Abraham Lincoln while he was President during the Civil War. He was in a hospital visiting some wounded soldiers. One of the young soldiers had lost both of his legs. He was extremely ill and sinking rapidly. Lincoln asked the young man if there was anything he could do

for him. The young soldier said, "You can write a letter to my mother." Lincoln patiently copied the letter as the young man dictated it. It went like this:

My dearest mother: I have been shot bad, but am bearing up. I tried to do my duty. They tell me I cannot recover. God bless you and Father. Kiss Mary and John for me.

Lincoln ended the letter with the words: "Written by Abraham Lincoln." When the young men reviewed the letter and realized that the man who helped write it was the President of the United States, he was shocked. "You are the President?" he asked. "Yes," Lincoln responded, "is there anything else I can do for you?" "I guess you might hold my hand, and see me through." Lincoln did. He sat by the side of that bed until late in the night when the young soldier died. Lincoln could have rationalized, saying, "I am an important man. I do not need to waste my time on some young soldier who is going to die anyway." But he did not have that attitude. Instead he acted in as kind a way as he possibly could. That is how love is. Love is kind.

In order to show the love of Christ to the world, we need to be patient with others. We need to be kind to other people. We should not do this merely in hopes of receiving something. We should act this way because God has treated us in the same way. There are many people in the world who are hurting emotionally and physically. They need a friend who will be patient and kind. Be that kind of a friend out of loyalty to Jesus Christ.

Paul continues his explanation of how Christian love acts by saying that "love is not jealous" (1 Cor. 13:4). The word for jealous in Greek is zeloo. It sounds like the English word "zealous". We can also hear the similarity in sound with "Zealots," an ambitious group among the Jews in the first century. Zeloo means to possess a strong desire for something. Thus in the bad sense it means that we strongly desire something that is wrong. Paul says the loving person is not filled with jealousy or envy toward other people.

Jealousy or envy hurts the person who is envious more than anyone else. The story is told of a wrestler who was very jealous of a famous wrestler. When the great wrestler died, a statue of him was erected. The jealous man would go out at night and wrestle with the statue. Finally he managed to turn the statue over, but it fell on him and killed him. Whether that really happened or not, I do not know, but it is true that jealousy will hurt you more than the person of whom you are jealous. When something good happens to other people, the loving reaction is to be happy for them.

The Bible has many examples of jealousy, and frequently jealousy led to other problems and further sin. In the story of Cain and Abel, jealousy led to the first murder in human history. In the story of Sarah and Hagar jealousy led to bitterness and rivalry between two women, one being driven out from her home as a result. In the story of Joseph jealousy led to brothers selling their own brother into slavery, only barely stopping short of killing him. In the story of Saul and David jealousy led to several occasions of attempted murder. In

the parable of the prodigal son jealousy meant unhappy relations among family members. Jealousy is sin and will lead to unhappiness. Christian love is not jealous.

Next Paul tells us that love is not "boastful" (1 Cor. 13:4). The Greek term here (*perpereuomai*) means to behave as a braggart or a wind-bag. It means to boast or to brag. As some other translations put it, love makes no parade. It is not out for display. Love does not brag. Love is not conceited. Love is not proud. If anything should keep a Christian humble and help him avoid being boastful, it should be the fact that God has saved us by his grace. We did not deserve or merit the love of God that sent Christ into this world (Jn. 3:16).

A humorous story shows how we should not be boastful, especially in religious display. It is told that a man in a village in Africa bought some shoes from a store in town and attempted to return them the next week. He admitted that the shoes fit. They were not damaged in any way. When asked why he wanted to return the shoes, he said it was because they did not squeak! He wanted a pair of new shoes that made noise when he walked, so that when he arrived late at church services and walked down the aisle to his seat, people would hear him and take notice. This man was boastful about his attendance at worship services. Instead he should have been humbled that God loved him enough to provide Jesus on the cross to purchase the church and make worship possible in the first place.

One of the most boastful men who ever lived was Nero, a Roman emperor in the first century. He fancied himself a great athlete, actor, and musician. He would

compete in chariot races and in musical contests at various places around the Roman Empire. Whether playing the lyre, singing, or dancing, Nero was probably only a mediocre performer. He was so cruel to anyone who threatened his rule as Caesar, though, that audiences would applaud his performances and award him for his acting achievements. This was done to keep Nero's temper in check, in hopes that he would leave town and leave the people alone. Nero's inordinate vanity or boasting was the cause of much misery in the lives of many people. Every sector of Roman society was glad when Nero was gone. A person controlled by Christian love will not be conceited as Nero was.

Next Paul says love "is not arrogant" (1 Cor. 13:5). The Greek word (*phusioo*) means to blow up or puff up, thus, to puff oneself up with pride. The meaning is almost identical to the previous word Paul used. It means to be proud, arrogant, or conceited. It refers to the kind of person who puts on airs or has an inflated opinion of self. A related Greek word (*phusao*) literally means to blow or puff. It refers to blowing on musical instruments like a flute or bag-pipe, of blowing out a fire, or the blowing of the wind. Likewise when a person is arrogant, we speak of them as being swelled up with pride. Instead of saying something meaningful, they blow a lot of hot air by bragging on themselves all the time.

Some other translations of this phrase can help us to grasp the exact meaning. Love does not cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Love gives itself no airs. Love is not conceited. Love is not snobbish. Paul

frequently referred to the Corinthians being "puffed up" or "arrogant," so this was a real problem in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1). Pride or arrogance is a terrible sin that leads to many other sins. In the Old Testament we are told, "Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate" (Prov. 8:13). Another very arrogant man in history was Napoleon. He thought he was in a special category and did not have to obey the same conventions that other men should. Napoleon was in favor of the sanctity of the home and public worship as long as it was someone else who kept these rules. Of himself he said, "I am not a man like other men. The laws of morality do not apply to me."

The story is frequently told of a poor farmer and his wife who sacrificed greatly in order to be able to send their son to college or a university. The farmer and his wife decided to surprise their son by visiting him at the school. Their only transportation was a simple wagon pulled by a couple of mules. They had no automobile. Their clothes were simple clothes, home-spun. Compared to most of the wealthy parents of other students at the school, the poverty of this couple was obvious. Nevertheless, the farmer and his wife never thought their son would be ashamed of them. All the way to the school the old man kept saying, "I'll see my son soon. He sure will be surprised. Won't he be glad to see us."

When the parents arrived at the university and found their son, he was surprised. He did not want his friends to know that he came from such humble, poor origins, so the young man pretended not to know his parents. He

examples in the Greek papyri it probably refers to cursing and swearing. Instead of being rude, love is tactful. Love does not do things with the intent of embarrassing another person or hurting them in any way. Love shows a concern for the feelings of other people. Love shows courtesy and kindness, and these should be common virtues among Christians. Yet, we know that rudeness is very common in mankind. This is because we are sinful. Sin, which emphasizes self, is not going to display courtesy toward others.

Some other translations can help us to understand Paul's meaning here. Love is not ill-mannered. Love never behaves unbecomingly. As one man put it, rudeness is a weak man's imitation of strength. If we are insecure about ourselves, we might be rude to other people, thinking that this will impress others with our importance. Rudeness, then, is more likely a sign of weakness rather than of strength. I remember one lady who was constantly rude to other people. She was very arrogant and thought herself to be an extremely important individual. Little did she know that she was disliked by many people because of her rudeness.

Next Paul says, "Love does not insist on its own way" (1 Cor. 13:5). As others have rendered it, love is not self-seeking. Love is not forward and self-assertive. Love does not insist on its own rights. Love does not insist on all to which it has a claim. Love is not selfish. Love does not have to have its own way. If you have Christian love, you can give up something that belongs to you for the sake of another person. The story is told about Abraham Lincoln and his two sons that illustrates this. A neighbor

noticed Lincoln's two boys crying very loudly. He asked what the problem was. Lincoln responded, "Just what is the matter with the whole world! I have three walnuts, and each boy wants two." Truly selfishness is a common problem.

By contrast love is unselfish. For example think of how many times a mother has only had one cookie or only enough of a special delicacy for one person. With almost no thought at all of sacrifice, many mothers have given all of that cookie or special treat to their child. Those mothers could rightly demand at least half, but because of love they want to give it all to their child. This is the way Christians should act towards other people. It is illustrated in a Christian song that children sometimes sing. It goes like this: "J-O-Y. J-O-Y. This is what it means. Jesus first, yourself last, and others in between." We should put Jesus our Lord first. Next, we should love our neighbor as ourself and before ourself.

Paul the apostle encouraged this unselfish attitude among the Corinthians. He wrote, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Cor. 10:24). Elsewhere he criticized some selfish people: "They all look after their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:21). If we want to be Christians, we must have the "mind" of Christ (Phil. 2:5). Christ did not think of himself. Rather he took on the form of a servant and thought of the welfare of others (Phil. 2:6-8). Likewise Paul commands Christians to "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4).

A simple story illustrates this. A man purchased a field next to a farmer. This farmer had been involved in a long dispute with the previous owner of the adjoining land over the boundary line. The new owner decided to defuse the problem immediately. He approached the farmer and said: "I am your new neighbor. I would like to talk to you about the boundary line between our properties." The farmer gruffly replied: "What about it?" "How much do you claim of this field belongs to you?" the new owner asked. The farmer loudly responded: "I claim your fence is two feet over my property." "Well, then," the new owner said, "I will move the fence back very soon." This completely surprised the farmer. When he determined that the new owner really meant what he said, he insisted that the fence stay right where it was and that would be the property line.

Sometimes giving up one's rights for the sake of another person only results in loss or pain. Some people will take advantage of you, so we must not be naive and let evil people take advantage of our good will. But in this situation with the farmer, giving up some of one's rights resulted in friendship and the end of an old squabble. By not demanding everything that may be rightfully ours, we may gain untold blessings. Christian love does not always demand everything. Christian love will sacrifice for the good of others just as Christ gave himself on the cross for the sins of the world.

Next Paul says love "is not irritable" (1 Cor. 13:5). The term here (*parogsuno*) means to become irritated or angry. A related Greek word (*parogsizo*) means "to have a somewhat sharp smell." It can refer to something that

aggravates, provokes, or irritates. Think of how some things that you smell burn your nose or irritate your eyes. Paul is referring here to the kind of person who is easily irritated or upset by others. He refers to one who is easily angered or provoked, one who is bad-tempered. This is the kind of person we call "touchy." We should get angry and provoked over sin, injustice, and wrongdoing in society, but here Paul is talking about a mean attitude of a person who gets angry over nothing. If we possess love, we will not be easily provoked. We will not be quick to take offense.

Abraham Lincoln, the President of the United States in the 1860s, had a political opponent who frequently insulted him. He called Lincoln a low cunning clown. He referred to him as the original gorilla. He said that if you wanted to see a gorilla, you did not have to wander around Africa looking for one. You merely had to go to the town where Lincoln lived and look at him. Stanton said many other insulting things about Lincoln, but Lincoln would not get angry and lose his temper. In fact, years later when he was President, Lincoln appointed Stanton to a high government office. When Lincoln was assassinated, Stanton shed tears, saying, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." By not being irritable, Lincoln had won the admiration of his enemy.

The greatest example of one who had love and was not irritable is Jesus Christ. When he was enduring a mockery of a trial before his crucifixion, the Jews and the Roman soldiers did various things to try to provoke Jesus. They falsely accused him. They spat in his face and

slapped him. They mocked his claims to be king (Mt. 26:65-68; 27:27-31). Through all of these insults, Jesus never lost his temper. He either replied very calmly to their questions or remained silent. The apostle Peter summarizes the self-control our Lord had at his trial: "He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he trusted to him who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

Jesus restrained himself out of love for us. While he was on the cross, bystanders continued to mock him (Mt. 27:39-44). He could have appealed to God for thousands of angels to help him, but he restrained himself (Mt. 26:53). Even as they were nailing Jesus to the cross as if he was a common criminal, he had the self-control and love to pray, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Jesus and Paul taught Christians not to seek personal revenge (Mt. 5:38-48; Rom. 12:14-21); and here Jesus exemplified for us love which is not irritable.

Paul says love is not "resentful" (1 Cor. 13:5). The Greek term (*logizomai*) literally means to reckon, count, or calculate. It is a common business term in Greek for charging or putting something on someone's account. Love is not quick to make a record book of every wrong that one has suffered. Instead of dwelling on wrong's suffered, love tends to forget them in forgiveness. The term has been translated and explained in various ways. For example, love does not take account of a wrong that is suffered. Love holds no grudges. Love does not brood over injuries. Love never harbors evil thoughts. Love

keeps no score of wrong. Love will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. Love does not brood over wrongs. Love takes not account of evil.

Some people nurse their wrath and keep it hot. They brood over a wrong they have suffered until it is almost impossible to forget the wrong or forgive the person who harmed them. Some people make a wrong suffered seem much worse than it really is by constantly thinking about it. To use a common expression in America that is based on small mounds of dirt made by a small animal called a mole, they make a mountain out of a molehill by dwelling on a wrong suffered.

As always our greatest example on how to love is found in the life of Christ. God and Christ could have been resentful toward mankind because of sin. God could have said that man was not worth saving. Christ could have said that man was not worth the trouble of coming into the world to die for man's sins. We should be thankful that God so loved the world that he was not resentful. As Paul explained it, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Even though we were not worthy of it, God loved us enough to work our redemption (Rom. 5:6-10).

Next Paul says that love "does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right" (1 Cor. 13:6). How do you react when another person does what is right? Love congratulates another for doing what is right or living the truth. How do you react when your enemies have problems? Do you laugh with joy? We should pray for them instead (Mt. 5:43-48). We should wish the best

even for our enemies. How do you react when you hear of another person's sin? Love is never glad when others go wrong. Some people, though, would rather hear a bad story about someone than a good one. Most people like to gossip, and gossip is almost always a tale of another person's problems or sins. The Old Testament says, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles" (Prov. 24:17). Christian love does not gloat over the wickedness of other people. It is never glad when wrong is done. It finds no pleasure in injustice done to others. Rather it rejoices whenever truth wins out. It rejoices at the victory of truth. It sides happily with the truth.

This is illustrated in the story of a young man who worked for a lumber salesman for several years. Eventually he left and started his own company selling lumber. His business went quite well. He even took a lot of customers away from his old employer. Then tragedy struck. A fire destroyed all of his supply of lumber. The day after the fire he was sitting in his office trying to decide what to do. He saw his old employer walking up. He wrongly assumed that his old employer had come by to gloat over his misfortune. He thought his old boss was going to laugh and taunt him, saying, "You should never have gone into business in competition with me." The young man suddenly had a strong feeling of hatred for his old boss. Instead the old employer said, "I know you have a lot of contracts to fill for lumber, and because of the fire you are unable to fill those orders. You can fill your orders with lumber from my lumber yard and repay me at your own convenience." Suddenly his hate for his

woman who has found a silver coin that has been lost (Lk. 15:8-10). It is like a father whose wayward son has returned home to him (Lk. 15:11-32). In these three parables the only one who is not joyful is the older brother of the wayward boy (Lk. 15:25-30). This older brother has a resentful attitude that would rejoice at the wrong rather than the right. It is the opposite of Christian love.

At the end of time when Christ returns, God will gather all the people of the world throughout history together for the great and final judgment day. On that day many people will be sent to hell for eternity as punishment for their sin (Mt. 25:41-46; Rev. 20:11-15). The Bible never pictures God as being joyful when he sends the wicked away into hell. God is love, therefore, his desire is that all would be saved. As Peter explains, God "is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). Similarly Paul says, God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). To speak in a human way about God, God will have a tear in his eye when he condemns the wicked to eternal hell. On the other hand, God will have a smile on his face when he sends the righteous to heaven for their eternal reward. Just as God and all of heaven rejoice in the good, we must do the same if we are to have Christian love.

In defining what Christian love is, in particular how it acts, Paul says, "Love bears all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). Paul uses a very interesting term here (*stego*) which is capable of having more than one meaning. The word can

mean to bear, stand, or endure. If this is the meaning, then Paul has repeated himself with the last part of verse 7. This is very possible, but we will delay our exposition of the concept of endurance until a later chapter. More likely here is another meaning of this word. It can mean to cover up. As a noun (stegē) this word means a roof that covers a house. A related verb (stegazo) means to cover or to roof a house. Thus the word Paul uses can mean to provide shelter, to protect, to conceal, or to keep hidden.

As a house provides a good covering from the rain for those underneath, love can provide a covering. Rather than dragging another person's faults out into the open, love tends to be merciful and forgiving, passing over those sins and keeping a fault hidden or secret. Love can keep an embarrassing matter confidential. Love throws a cloak over what is displeasing in another person. Love covers over flaws and imperfections. This does not mean that love winks at sin and glosses over it, condoning it. Rather love does not drag it into the light for the purpose of embarrassing someone out of enjoyment at another's discomfort.

Some other translations help explain this meaning of Paul's words. Love always protects. Love knows how to be silent. Love is always slow to expose. Love throws a cloak of silence over what is displeasing in another person. Love overlooks faults. James gives instructions similar to this: "My brethren, if any one among you wanders from the truth and some one brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will

cover a multitude of sins" (Jas. 5:19-20). The covering of a multitude of sins can refer to the forgiveness we obtain by being active in saving others. More likely it refers to the covering over of the other person's sins. That is the goal of Christian love, namely, the covering up of all sins. We urge people to turn to Jesus Christ in order that his blood can cover their sins and accomplish their salvation. Similarly the apostle Peter writes, "Above all hold unfailing love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

In the Bible an example of this type of love is found in the story of Joseph and Mary. Mary was pregnant with the Christ child. This pregnancy was unique. It was miraculous. The child was conceived in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk. 1:34-36). The conception and birth of Jesus was of a virgin (Mt. 1:22-23). This is because Jesus was unique. He was the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us (Mt. 1:23; Lk. 1:35). At this time Mary was betrothed to Joseph (Mt. 1:18). Betrothal was more than being promised or engaged. Joseph and Mary were considered husband and wife during this betrothal stage, but they did not live together. They had had no sexual relations at this point (Mt. 1:18; Lk. 1:34). Mary was in an unusual situation. She was a virgin, yet, she was pregnant.

To break a betrothal, Jewish custom said a man could divorce the woman. Matthew explains it this way: "When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to

divorce her quietly" (Mt. 1:18-19). An angel appeared to Joseph as he was planning to divorce Mary and explained to him that she had not been immoral. Joseph was told that the child was a child of the Holy Spirit, and he should go ahead and take Mary as his wife (Mt. 1:20-21). The point for our study, though, is that before the angel explained the circumstances to Joseph, he was going to divorce Mary. He assumed that Mary had been immoral, but instead of divorcing her publically and bringing great shame to Mary, Joseph was going to do it quietly. He did not approve of the sin he wrongly assumed that she had committed, but he was not going to drag her faults out into the public eye. That is what Christian love does. It will overlook faults in others without condoning sin.

Another good example of this type of love in action in the lives of Christians would be homes for unwed mothers. These homes are places for these young women to live until they give birth to their children. Usually the children are adopted by Christian couples. In fact, my wife and I were foster parents for such a home and kept nine children until they were placed for adoption. One baby, a beautiful Black girl, was with us for six months until a kind family adopted her. We also had Spanish, Anglo, and mixed babies in our care. The unwed mothers had sinned, and had been sinned against. Instead of publicizing their mistakes, the homes for unwed mothers help them to deal quietly with the problem through adoption while hopefully the girls seek the forgiveness of God for their actions. These homes give the girls an alternative to making a further mistake in aborting the

fetus and destroying a life. These homes are truly an example of Christian love which covers over sin.

A young man in Chicago was saved from alcohol by the knowledge of Jesus Christ. His life took a radical turn for the good. This continued for many months, and everyone was amazed and pleased with his progress. During the cold winter months which Chicago has, this young man was walking home. He was delayed by the raising and lowering of a bridge across a river. To escape the cold wind and snow, he stepped into a bar where they serve alcoholic drinks. In that setting where he had been many times before, he gave in to temptation and ordered a drink. He ordered another and another. When he left the bar, he was intoxicated or drunk.

Two young men from the church he attended saw him leaving the bar and followed him part of the way home. What would they do? Would they tell everyone that this young man was drinking once again? Would they gossip about him? Would they ridicule him and discourage him? No. They took him home that night and got him sober. They told him that no one else would ever know what had happened that night. They encouraged him. The next morning this young man was sober and sorry for what he had done. He knelt with his friends and prayed to God for forgiveness and for strength to never give in to alcohol again. And he never did drink again. He became a minister of the gospel. How different it might have been if those two friends had not treated his sin with a loving attitude.

Love bears all things. To show Christian love we should take this approach with other people. Instead of

trying to broadcast all the dirt and filth we know about other people through gossip, let us speak of others the best we can. Let us quietly work to help others correct their faults. Let us be humble when we are aware of the faults of others, knowing that we ourselves are not perfect.

Paul continues his definition of how Christian love acts by saying, "Love believes all things, hopes all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). This means that love does not give up easily. Love continues to believe and hope for the best. This does not mean that we should refuse to believe strong evidence about misconduct by other people, but in doubtful cases where one is uncertain, love gives another the benefit of the doubt and prefers to err on the side of generosity. Love means that we should not jump to conclusions about others if we do not know for certain (Mt. 7:1-5). It means that we will encourage and wish for the best in other people. Love always expects the best. Love is always eager to believe the best. Love is completely trusting, and it never ceases to hope. If you love someone you will always believe in him or her and always expect the best.

Because of love, a Christian should keep on hoping for a change for the good in another person. Even after many failures in trying to convert a person, a Christian should keep on trying out of love. A Christian should try to avoid becoming cynical, negative, and pessimistic. We should not be naive and let people fool us and use us, but let us keep on trying to bring people to a knowledge of the Savior Jesus Christ and the lifestyle he wants us to live. There is much evil and sin in the world, and every

person is a sinner before God (Rom. 3:10, 23). Nevertheless, there is much good in the world and many good people (Rom. 2:14; Acts 10:1-2). Someone has said, "An optimist expects his dreams to come true; a pessimist expects his nightmares to come true." As Christians with love in our hearts for other people, we should believe and hope for the best from them in order to help and encourage them to fulfill their higher aspirations.

A convict was released from prison and later converted to Christ. He obtained a job handling huge amounts of money for a business man. For five years he never stole a single cent from that man. When that job was no longer needed, the employer recommended the ex-convict to a friend in another city. In less than three weeks he was arrested for stealing from his new employer. The first employer rushed to visit him in jail and ask what had happened. He asked: "Ike, how is it that when you worked for me you could be trusted with anything, and that as soon as you came into this new employment you went back to your old dishonest life?" Ike broke into tears and answered: "I could not help it. He suspected me, and I had to steal."

We know that this man was not forced to steal. With every temptation there is a means of escape (1 Cor. 10:13); yet, the feeling of distrust from his new employer discouraged Ike. As long as his first boss believed and hoped in him, it helped him stay honest. He wanted to live up to the expectations of his trusting, hoping employer. His new boss did not believe in him, and Ike fell to temptation. Believing in people will often bring

out the best in them. Distrusting others may discourage them and bring out the worst. If parents tell their children, "You are no good," their children might believe it and act terribly. If parents tell their children, "You are good. You are intelligent. You can accomplish great things," their children will probably believe it and make their parents proud. Love "believes all things, hopes all things."

Adam Clark is a well-known writer of commentaries from a century ago. It is said that in school he was a very slow student. One day a distinguished visitor came to visit his class. The teacher made fun of Adam Clark in front of this visitor, saying, "That is the stupidest boy in the school." That visitor felt sorry for Adam and spoke with him before he left that day. He told Adam, "Never mind, my boy, you may be a great scholar some day. Do not be discouraged but try hard, and keep on trying." The teacher had no more hope for Adam Clark, but the hope of this visitor inspired Clark to work hard. Certainly that word of encouragement helped Clark to become the great man and writer we know.

A young man, the son of a modest farmer, went off to school. He got involved with the wrong friends and began to gamble. He soon had huge gambling debts that he could not pay. He was caught trying to steal some money through forgery and was convicted of his crime. While on the way to prison, he escaped and went to live in another part of the country. His father still loved his son. He worked hard and paid off the gambling debts. He obtained a pardon for his son's crime. He hired the former law officer to go hunt for his wayward son.

Many miles away the law officer found the boy in a gambling hall to which there was only one door in or out. When this young man saw the law officer, he assumed that he had come to arrest him. He ran for the door, pushing the law officer down on the floor. The deputy managed to hold on to the young man's leg long enough to tell him he had not come to arrest him. "I have a pardon from the governor for you. I have come to take you home to your father."

The young man stopped and read the pardon from the governor. He then tore it into little pieces and threw it on the floor. "What good does that pardon do me? I cannot go home to my father after the way I have shamed him. He hates me, and I can not bear to look him in the face." The deputy then gave the young man a note from his father which read: "My Dear Boy: The miserable debt is paid; the governor has pardoned you. Your old father has never ceased to love and long for you, and freely forgives you. Come home to me."

This young man, so hardened by sin, suddenly started to cry and tremble. His heart was touched by the love of a father, a love that kept on trusting and hoping. The father's love endured in spite of the sins of his son. That enduring love won the son and brought him home in the end. This true story is similar to one of the parables of Jesus,—the prodigal son. In that parable the love of the father never gave up on the wayward son. In the end that love helped rescue that son from a life of shame and misery. The father in the prodigal son parable is symbolic of God who loves us with a hopeful love.

It is a pitiful thing to see a person in whom nobody

believes. It is even sadder to see a person who then thinks that way about himself. That type of individual is doomed to failure. On the other hand, you cannot conquer an individual who still has hope. You can take away everything a person has, but if that individual still has hope, he can stand tall. If you know that someone believes in you, it will help you to be good. If you have a godly Christian mother or father or husband or wife whom you love dearly and who expects you to be moral, holy, and righteous, it helps you to face and defeat the devil. Let us show Christian love to others by being encouragers of other people. As a preacher told a little girl at the end of a famous movie, "We looked for the good in them, and we found it!" Let us live like that.

The apostle Paul concludes his explanation of how love acts by saying, "Love endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). The term (hupomeno) Paul uses means to remain rather than running away; thus, it means to endure, to hold out, and to stand one's ground. It is used for a wounded person enduring pain. It can denote the calm acceptance of problems, heroism in the face of persecution, or even the courage to refuse temptation. Despite trouble and affliction, one who truly loves God will not give up. We will not give up on God or the truth. We will be more prone to continue to give aid and support to another person who is weak and faltering. We will endure with them and endure much from them.

To endure all things out of love does not mean that we accept whatever comes our way with passive resignation. Instead we work creatively to try to achieve some good even in the worst of circumstances, knowing

"that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Many times a parent or a husband or a wife will endure much pain and hurt due to the sin of a child or a wife or a husband. Instead of hating that person, Christian love endures and continues to work for a positive outcome. Christian love means that we will not quit or give up easily.

A simple story illustrates how an enduring love may win in the end. A preacher received a message that a young boy from his Sunday school class was sick. It turned out that the boy had been shot with a gun! Apparently some boys were playing with the father's gun without knowing it was loaded. When the preacher arrived at the house, the doctors told him that the boy would not live very long. The boy's father was at the house, but he was drunk. After some time the father sobered up enough to talk to his son. He kept saying, "My little boy is better. He will get well." The boy knew differently and replied, "No papa, I will not get well."

The father felt guilty for being a poor father and for always being drunk, so he told his son, "No. You will get well. I will change my ways and quit drinking." The little boy said, "When I am gone papa, I want you to remember that I loved you, even if you did get drunk all the time." That statement broke the father's heart. He ran outside crying and fell down on the ground. The preacher went outside to comfort him. The father sobbed, "After my child loves me like that, I ought to straighten up and be the right kind of man." The little boy died, and the father did change his life. He quit

drinking that very day. The next Sunday he began to attend church worship services. Love from a little boy had endured and won.

In many places in the Bible, living a Christian life is compared to an athlete training or competing in a race. In order to train properly and run well, an athlete must endure much pain and hardship. Your legs get tired. Your lungs gasp for more air. Your whole body tells you to stop, to quit, to abandon your efforts. Only the athlete that is willing to endure the pain and fatigue will run the race to the end. The Corinthians could understand what Paul meant when he said, "Love endures all things." Endurance was well-known to them. Corinth was located on an isthmus in Greece. Some games held there called the Isthmian Games were second only to the Olympics.

Paul urges Christians to show endurance in a similar way in living the Christian life. He wrote, "Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Well, I do not run aimlessly, I do not box as one beating the air; but I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (1 Cor. 9:24-27). If anyone ought to be willing to endure the hardest of trials, it should be Christians. Our reward is not some worldly trifle that will vanish in time. It is an eternal home in heaven.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews also compared our living the Christian life to the endurance of an

athlete: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:1-2). A runner who wants to endure to the end of a race does not need weights that will burden him down. He wants the lightest possible shoes and clothing. A runner wanting to win a race would not carry a basket of fruit in his hands. Likewise we are told in Hebrews to put away sin, so that we can endure in running the Christian race. Quitters never win, and winners do not quit. Christians should endure through love rather than quit.

Paul said, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Paul endured. He pressed on. He did not quit. We are told to "hold our first confidence firm to the end" (Heb. 3:14). As Christians we need to endure and persevere in spite of opposition or persecution (Rom. 5:3-4; 2 Tim. 2:3). We should not be faint in our prayer life (Rom. 12:12; Col. 4:2; Eph. 6:18; Acts 2:42). We need to persevere in right doctrine, in purity, in right worship, in regular fellowship, and in weekly partaking of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Heb. 10:25; Rom. 2:6-7). Only by enduring to the end will we receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

A missionary was sitting with a preacher on a balcony watching people walk up and down the street. As one young man walked by, out of hearing distance of

the two men, the preacher remarked, "That man made a great start a year ago as a Christian." Of another young man he said, "That young man came to the meetings last fall." Of a young lady he said, "That girl started in the meeting when the evangelist was here last spring." He made similar comments about a dozen or so people who were not faithful at that time. The missionary finally replied, "You have a great number of starters here, but are none of them planning to finish?" We must endure, not merely start.

We also need to endure with other people. Instead of giving up on others when they make their first mistake, we need to continue to try to help them live the Christian life. We must not be naive and let dishonest people take advantage of us, but with honest individuals, endurance may win in the end. A story from Scotland illustrates this. A Sunday school teacher was invited to bring all the little boys from her Bible class to the house of a rich man. This wealthy man was going to give every little boy some new clothes. Most of the boys were pleased with the new clothes and took excellent care of them.

One little boy did not keep his new suit clean. He was not careful with it and several torn places soon appeared on it. He was the worst behaved boy in the Bible class and had the worst attendance. The teacher was about to give up on him. The wealthy man wanted to give him another chance. He bought the boy another set of clothes to wear to church. The same thing happened again. The teacher said, "I am utterly discouraged about Bob and must give up on him." The man encouraged her to try

one more time with the boy. They did, and Bob became more interested in the lessons. His attendance improved. Later he studied for the ministry. When he was an adult he went to China as a missionary. This was all the result of Christian love which endured.

Chapter 4

CORINTH, LOVE, AND TONGUES

“Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:8).

Paul's lengthy discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 was necessary primarily because of the abuse of the gift of tongues by the Corinthians. What were tongues? How did the Corinthians abuse them? Why was the discussion on love inserted in the middle of the discussion on tongues? Do people still speak in tongues today? These are questions which we will attempt to answer.

First, tongues were languages. The gift of tongues was the ability to speak in another language which one had never studied. This was important for two reasons. It was evidence that God was working through that individual. Also, it could be useful in mission work. We can know what tongues were by the events on the first day of Pentecost. There the apostles were given this gift by the Holy Spirit. In Jerusalem at that time were Jewish people from many parts of the old Roman empire. These people no longer shared a common language. Many of them could no longer speak Hebrew like their ancestors. Many of them knew Greek, but this was a second language for most of them. Since the Jews had

been dispersed all over the world, they spoke many different languages.

On the first day of Pentecost as Peter and the other apostles began to preach to these people, the crowds were amazed, because "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:6). They asked, "How is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language" (Acts 2:8)? According to verse 4 the apostles were speaking in tongues. These tongues are defined as languages in verses 6 and 8. The tongues in 1 Corinthians 12-14 are the same gift. Realize that the events in Acts 2 happened before those in 1 Corinthians 12-14; yet, Acts was written after the book of Corinthians. It is ridiculous to assume, as some authors do, that the gift of tongues in Corinth was different from what occurred on the first day of Pentecost. Why would Luke, a companion of Paul, contradict Paul by saying the tongues were languages if they were not? He would not, so the tongues were languages. The fact that tongues could be interpreted demonstrates that they were languages (1 Cor. 14:27-28).

The modern day so-called speaking in tongues is not a miraculous speaking in a human language never studied in school. Many language experts and scientists have listened to modern day tongue speakers and studied tape recordings of their utterances. Repeatedly they conclude that it is gibberish. Occasionally it includes some words of a certain language, but that is all. Every one knows a few words in several languages. I do not know Russian but I know that "nyet" means "no." I do not know Spanish, but I know that "Senor" means "man" or "Sir."

This is all the speaking in a foreign language that modern day so-called tongue speakers are able to do. They speak a string of sounds and syllables similar to their own language, so it only sounds similar to a language.

Many scientific, linguistic surveys have concluded that modern day glossolalia (tongue speaking) is not a real foreign language.¹ These studies say the speech resembles infantile speech, predominating in vowels (words like ma ma, da da, ba ba), although some tongue speakers are more polished than others. The speakers use syllables from their own language. For example, English speakers use syllables known from English. This demonstrates that they are not speaking in another language, but merely saying gibberish or babbling in their own language. In other investigation, Kildahl made tapes of tongue speaking and allowed Eugene A. Nida and other linguistic experts to study them. Citing this work plus other extensive study done by Nida and William J. Samarin, Kildahl concluded that "spoken utterances of glossolalists do not meet" the criteria for human language. . . .Glossic utterances cannot be human languages."²

It has also been noted that the time given to interpretation of the tongue is frequently dramatically different in length from the time taken to speak in the tongue. If a person speaks for one minute in a tongue, it might take the interpreter five minutes to translate. It is evident that the interpreter is not translating, but merely making up something to say. The authenticity of these tongues is very doubtful. Furthermore, the same

phrases repeated by the same "tongue speaker" in different settings have been "interpreted" by different "interpreters" in different ways!

A humorous experiment demonstrates that modern day speaking in tongues is babbling rather than a miracle of the Holy Spirit. A group of students who had never heard of speaking in tongues was asked to speak spontaneously in an unknown language. They babbled away as best they could. This was tape recorded. Then a group of Pentecostals were recorded while "speaking in tongues." Finally, both tape recordings were played to yet another group of Pentecostals. This last group judged that both tape recordings were speaking in tongues, in another human language. The humorous part is that they determined that the college students, who were just playing and having fun, were speaking a better glossolalia than the one done sincerely!³

One man, who was raised in Africa as the son of a missionary, attended a tongue speaking meeting of Pentecostals. He arose and spoke the Lord's model prayer (Mt. 6:9-13) in an African dialect he had learned while in Africa. A so-called interpreter then arose to give an interpretation of his tongue speaking. The interpreter claimed the message was about the imminent second coming of Christ! Is this not ridiculous? Incidents like this should make it clear that modern day so-called tongue speaking is not the same as the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit which the apostles possessed.

Coaching or teaching is commonly used to train people to speak in modern tongues. John Kildahl is even able to list five steps necessary to induce someone to

speaking in tongues.⁴ Actually people are encouraged by peer pressure and other manipulative, emotional techniques to speak an infantile babble, and nothing more. If it were really a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, why would people have to be taught how to speak in tongues? We find no examples of this in the Bible.

The difference between the real tongues of the Bible and the so-called tongues of charismatics today is tremendous. Preus summarizes: "Sociologically, at least in the book of Acts, the tongues of which Scripture speaks have none of the elements which modern tongues do. There is no evidence of coaching . . . , no mention of tension which needed relief, nor of any trauma. There is no mention of leader dependency; in fact, the opposite is implied (cf. Acts 8 and 10). No mention of group camaraderie is made. No one seems to have been indoctrinated previously. In short, none of the present sociological or psychological manifestations inherent in the tongues of today are present in the Biblical narratives."⁵

After reviewing significant scientific and linguistic research which has demonstrated that so-called tongue speaking is not a language, in contrast to non-scholarly assertions by charismatics to the contrary, Preus asks: "Shall we believe dozens of linguistic experts who know hundreds of languages from dozens of language families and who have listened to hundreds of tapes for hundreds of hours, or shall we believe Don Basham when he says that Rose Robertson says that her friend's husband says that Rose spoke Syrian?"⁶ The answer is obvious to a candid person operating on the basis of reason. The

apostles and others were able to speak in real human languages which they had never studied. What Pentecostal people are speaking today is gibberish, "a regressive return to an earlier level of linguistic maturity," nothing more than a collection of sounds and syllables similar to their own language. It is not a miracle, and it is not from God.

Second, how were the Corinthians abusing the gift of tongues? The Corinthians were placing undue importance on the gift of tongues. Instead of using them for building up the church or converting the lost, tongue speaking had become a personal ego booster. While Paul does not despise speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 18), he says that it is the least of the miraculous spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:5). Paul put many limitations on the Corinthians' use of tongues. If there was no one to interpret, the tongue speakers were to keep silent, because they would be providing nothing beneficial to the congregation (1 Cor. 14:5, 19, 27-28). The Corinthians were abusing the gift of tongues, so Paul placed limitations on their use.

Tongue speaking was not a major item of faith in the early church. Out of all the New Testament documents, only Paul wrote to a church to discuss tongue speaking. Paul's writing to Corinth about tongues was due to excesses and problems associated with tongue speaking. Luke describes tongue speaking briefly in Acts, and it is mentioned once in Mark. Otherwise, the New Testament is silent on tongues. Peter does not mention them in his two letters, even though he spoke in them on Pentecost. James, John, and others do not mention tongues. The

only lengthy mention of tongues was to Corinth due to problems. Charismatics have stressed tongue speaking as a major item of faith. It simply was not so, and is not so.

Third, why was the discussion of love inserted in the middle of the discussion on tongues? The chief problem with the tongues at Corinth was the arrogant attitude of some of the Corinthians. They believed they were better than others, because they could speak in tongues. A similar arrogance is common among modern day Pentecostals. Paul was showing them that their gift was a lesser gift, not the highest gift. He reminded them that every one was a member who should work in coordination with other members (1 Cor. 12:12-31). Instead of seeking a miraculous spiritual gift for the sake of vanity, Paul showed the Corinthians "a still more excellent way," namely, the way of love (1 Cor. 12:31). Without love, speaking in tongues was senseless noise that was worthless (1 Cor. 13:1). The discussion of love is not extraneous to the matter of miraculous spiritual gifts. It is the key. Rather than seeking something to edify oneself, one should seek the way of unselfish love (1 Cor. 14:4).

Fourth, do people still speak in tongues today? No. People are able to speak in other languages, but this gift or ability is acquired by non-miraculous means through study and effort. It is not a miraculous ability given instantaneously by God. The miraculous gift of tongues ceased over a period of time as the New Testament was written and the church was able to stand on its own without a need to resort to miraculous spiritual gifts.

There have been missionaries sent out by religious groups to distant countries who assumed they would not have to do language study. They believed they would be given the gift of tongues. It never came. These missionaries ended up in language school.

One reason why many people are confused on the cessation of speaking in tongues is the wrong definition of tongue speaking. Many people think tongue speaking is nothing more than an ecstatic utterance spoken by an excited person who is filled with the glory of the Lord. The tragedy of this definition of tongue speaking is that it destroys the uniqueness of Christianity. Ecstatic utterances by highly emotional worshippers are a part of many different religious traditions throughout history. We do not deny that people are able to speak a babbling noise when in an excited state of worship frenzy. What we deny is that God is causing this. What we deny is that this is a gift of the Holy Spirit. What we deny is that this is equivalent to the gift of tongues in the New Testament. It is not the gift of tongues. It is not of the Holy Spirit. It is not miraculous. And it is not from God. It is a human, psychological phenomenon and nothing more.

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1. Mansell Pattison, "Behavior Science Research on the Nature of Glossolalia," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 20 (September 1968): 77. Cf. Weldon B. Bennett, "What the Bible Teaches About 'Speaking in Tongues,'" in *What the Bible Teaches*, ed. by Bill Flatt, et. al. (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1972), pp. 229-30.

- 2. John P. Kildahl, *The Psychology of Speaking Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. xi, 47.
3. Werner Cohn's research cited in Pattison, "Behavior Science Research," p. 78.
4. Cited by Klemet Preus, "Tongues: An Evaluation from a Scientific Perspective," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (October 1982): 283-84.
5. *Ibid*, p. 289.
6. *Ibid*, p. 287.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TONGUE SPEAKING

Paul the apostle predicted that miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues would cease. We know that this occurred by the end of the first century. Nevertheless, many Pentecostal groups and individuals today claim that they are able to speak in tongues. It has been demonstrated that their tongue speaking is mere babbling rather than speaking in another language as the gift was in New Testament times. It can be proven from history that speaking in tongues did cease by the end of the first century. An honest inquirer may then ask, "Why are people today desirous of a phenomenon like tongue speaking, since tongue speaking today is only a poor attempt to imitate the real New Testament gift?" In this chapter we will look at the psychology of speaking in tongues. Here we are not studying New Testament tongue speaking, but modern so-called tongue speaking or glossolalia which is a poor attempt to imitate the New Testament gift. Can this modern phenomenon be explained?

Much evidence has been accumulated by psychologists, scientists, and other researchers that modern so-called tongue speaking or glossolalia is not miraculous. The so-called tongues are not human languages miraculously spoken. The phenomenon is

psychologically conditioned in order to fulfill emotional and social needs of certain people. Many of the people involved in modern day glossolalia are struggling with severe personal or family problems. In their states of depression or deep guilt, they are reaching out for something real in the spiritual realm. Walking by faith is not enough to satisfy these people. Speaking in tongues gives them an emotional release from psychological pressure in their lives. With some coaching or by following the example of others, they begin to babble like a baby and become convinced that God is helping them speak in some unknown language.

The study of Paul A. Qualben, a psychiatrist, estimated that 85 percent of those involved in modern day glossolalia had anxiety caused by personal problems like marriage troubles, depression, financial pressures, or guilt before their experience in so-called tongue speaking. At the same time prayer groups of non-tongues speaking people were given the same psychological tests. It was found that only 30 percent expressed the same concern for problems in their lives. The study concluded, "We believe anxiety is a prerequisite for developing the ability to speak in tongues."¹

The three common traits of individuals who experience glossolalia outside socio-cultural groups like the Pentecostals, within which there is peer pressure to practice so-called tongue speaking, are:

1. The individual had suppressed religious feelings.
2. The individual had deep unresolved spiritual tension.

3. The individual had an impoverished spiritual life.²

This only confirms the rationale that modern day so-called tongue speaking is merely insecure people babbling like children in order to find acceptance in a group or in order to try to obtain an emotional crutch to help with personal problems in their lives.

Emma Gonsalvez studied the research of other scientists on Pentecostals and charismatics and added further research using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) Hysteria Subtle Scale (HyS) test plus personal observation, interviews, and a study of case histories. Gonsalvez summarized: "Glossolalists have been described as highly suggestible, submissive and dependent individuals who exaggerate any felt sensation. They come from disturbed homes, have a deep need for a personal security, emotional and social acceptance, are narcissistic with weak egos, confused identities, with a high level of anxiety, and personal instability."³ So-called speaking in tongues performed a "therapeutic function" to meet some needs in these people, but the same benefit is obtained by other people from counseling, friendship, a hobby, prayer, or a host of other activities which are not miraculous any more than modern glossalia is miraculous.

Gonsalvez's studies confirmed previous conclusions about the psychological profile of charismatics: "They appear to be confronted in their adult life with a great many unresolved conflicts that centre around trust-mistrust, love-hate, identity-confusion, and intimacy-alienation struggles. There seems to be a high level of anxiety in their lives. . . . [They] have been diagnosed to

be more of the passive-dependent, hysterical personality types, than any other personality. They not only have character traits in common, their motivation for their religious preference has been to a great extent need-based.”⁴

With a psychological profile of this nature, it is easy to see “that there could be psychologically-based reasons for participation in an ‘emotional’ religion like Pentecostalism.”⁵ Gonsalvez explains some of the dynamics: “They look for answers outside themselves. They are very dependent on their mothers, or some authority figures like teachers and leaders to solve their problems or bail them out of their crises. When this failed they have sought solutions through supernatural intervention.”⁶ Other factors are involved in the charismatic phenomenon, but psychology provides a reasonable explanation for why people may be involved in this form of religious expression, and why it can be emotionally satisfying to them.

The conviction that one is able to speak in tongues may be defended very aggressively, even in the face of facts to the contrary. Simply because a person has found some happiness or a way to cope with the pressures of life in the charismatic experience (the therapeutic function) is not an indicator that the experience is miraculous, especially since it can be explained through psychology. It is not to be denied that modern speaking in tongues may be a very emotional experience which gives one a special feeling, but this is not miraculous. This merely demonstrates that this so-called speaking in tongues is a contrived experience that fulfills some

psychological needs in a person's life.

Modern day tongue speakers frequently contend that speaking in tongues is evidence of a higher spirituality. They believe they are more mature and full-grown as Christians. They think they have a deeper love for the Lord and for the brotherhood of believers due to their speaking in tongues. Their closeness in fellowship is commendable, but can it not be reflective of their insecurity and need for emotional support, a need which led them into the false experience of tongue speaking to begin with? Rather than being a sign of maturity, it is a sign of immaturity.

Some glossolalists may fake their speaking in another language, but most of them are sincere. They sincerely believe their tongue speaking is an authentic experience given by the Holy Spirit. Modern psychological research, however, has been able to explain modern day tongue speaking completely. This means it is not a miracle. A miracle is supernatural. To explain a miracle one must appeal to a non-human, supernatural power, namely, God. No such appeal is necessary to explain modern tongue speaking. If a person wants to feel a part of a group, he will "learn" to speak in tongues with the aid of coaching from others in order to be accepted. If people have tremendous stress in their lives, they may speak in tongues in order to release their frustrations with life in an emotional frenzy. Still others may speak in tongues in order to obtain a feeling which gives them security in a supposed awareness of the presence of God.

Tongue speaking is not the Scriptural way to answer these problems, but it is the path many people choose.

Our religious faith and practice should be very satisfying to us emotionally. A true, deep Christian faith can fulfill every spiritual need a person has, including emotional needs. In the fellowship of the church we find companionship and friendship. In Christ's sacrifice on the cross we find the answer to guilt. In working for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God we find a purpose in life. In the resurrection we find hope for dealing with the fear of death. Truly Jesus came to give us the abundant life (Jn. 10:10). One's Christian faith should result in a satisfied life and emotional fulfillment. The problem arises when the emotions are used to guide an individual as to what is true.

Because we follow the truth, we are satisfied emotionally. If we find something that pleases us emotionally and assume that it is therefore true, we are going to be misled many times. Not only does sin have its pleasures (Heb. 11:25), but the human heart can deceive itself (Prov. 3:5-6; 14:12; Jer. 17:9). Emotional happiness should be the result of following the truth, but not the standard for determining what is true. God sets that standard and it does not change like fleeting emotions do. Sometimes we may feel sad, because it is necessary for us to do what we know is right. Modern tongue speaking is an example of sincere people being misled by their emotions. Since speaking in tongues feels good, participants in it assume it must be of God and right. This is an example of putting the cart before the horse.

After a thorough study of the psychological origins of so-called tongue speaking, Jimmy Jividen concluded:

"Psychological observations about glossolalia show it to be an experience that can be produced under controlled circumstances and in predictable ways. . . . It can be learned, practiced and polished. . . . The source of glossolalia is from man's own psyche. . . . The error is attributing something to God which is from man."⁷ Because there are many people with emotional needs, the church should reach out to help these people before some of them resort to charismatic error to find pseudo-fulfillment. The church can provide meaningful worship experiences, depth in prayer and devotional life, and support and encouragement in a loving fellowship of believers. I suggest that you can find all of these in the churches of Christ around the world.

1. John P. Kindahl, *The Psychology of Speaking in Tongues* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 58. Also see James N. Lapsley and John H. Simpson. "Speaking in Tongues: Infantile Babble or Song of the Self?" *Pastoral Psychology* 15 (September 1964): 16-24; idem, "Speaking in Tongues: Token of Group Acceptance and Divine Approval," *Pastoral Psychology* 15 (May 1964): 48-55; and Frank Stagg, E. Glenn Hinson, and Wayne E. Oates, *Glossolalia* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 76-99.
2. Jimmy Jividen, *Glossolalia: from God or man?* (Fort Worth: Star Bible Publications, 1971), pp. 151-57.
3. Emma Gonsalvez, "A Psychological Interpretation of the Religious Behavior of Pentecostals and Charismatics," *Journal of Dharma* 7 (October-December 1982): 415.

4. Ibid., pp. 425-26.
5. Ibid., p. 426.
6. Ibid., p. 425.
7. Jividen, Glossolalia, pp. 171-72.

THE CESSATION OF TONGUES IN CHURCH HISTORY

The apostle Paul predicted that the miraculous gifts possessed by the early church would cease. In 1 Corinthians 13 he stresses that the gifts related especially to the receiving of divine revelation, namely, prophecy and knowledge, would cease or pass away. Likewise, Paul said that tongues would cease (1 Cor. 13:7). The question for this lesson is whether or not this prediction has already been fulfilled, or is it to be fulfilled at some future date? There are many people wearing the name of Christ today who claim to be able to speak in tongues. In other chapters we have noted that contemporary claims to speak in tongues are not the same as the gift of tongues in the New Testament. We partially believe this because the cessation of tongues which Paul predicted occurred in the first century.

One way to examine this question is from the standpoint of church history. While church history cannot serve as our final authority, it can serve as a check on our reasoning and interpretation of the Scriptures. The Scriptures show a decline in miracles during the first century and point to their total cessation by the end of the first century. Does history confirm this? Realize that some claims of the ability to perform miracles have been made by various people throughout

history, so there will not be unanimity on this question. But it is valid to ask what the majority of Christians thought on this, especially during the first three centuries following the apostles.

An excellent survey of this question was made by Cleon Rogers, Jr. The subject of his study and his conclusion was: "If the gift of tongues did not cease completely in the first century, then there should be evidence of this continuation. If the gift is as important as many teach, then the leaders of the Post Apostolic Age should have stressed this and commended its practice highly. The evidence, however, does not indicate that tongues had a significant place in the church from A.D. 100 to 400."¹

Let us briefly note the evidence he presents by reviewing the writings of early Christians for 300 years. Beginning with those commonly called the Apostolic Fathers, he concludes that the gift of speaking in tongues "is nowhere alluded to, hinted at, or found in the Apostolic Fathers."² This is quite significant, because the Apostolic Fathers wrote to and from some of the same churches which possessed the gift of tongues in the New Testament documents. They covered a wide geographical area and were acquainted with church activities in many places. Also, their writings touch on practically every major doctrine taught in the New Testament. Their omission of any mention of speaking of tongues is highly significant. It must be because tongues had ceased as Paul predicted.

Rogers then reviews other early Christian writers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and

Chrysostom. All of these men were well acquainted with church activities and doctrine over a wide area. These men wrote on a wide variety of topics related to Christian doctrine. Some of them had traveled extensively. If speaking in tongues was still practiced and was as important as charismatics claim, we would expect frequent mention to be made of this phenomenon. Instead there is virtual silence, and the brief mention that is made is evidence that speaking in tongues had ceased. On rare occasions early Christian writers mention that tongue speaking occurred in the New Testament era, but of their own day they are mostly silent about it.

Irenaeus did say in one place that he had heard of the gift of speaking in tongues. He did not claim that he himself or those associated with him spoke in tongues. Besides the possibility of his referring back to the New Testament where there was tongue speaking, it is very likely that Irenaeus was referring to a fringe group of Christians called Montanists. Other than this possible reference to speaking in tongues, the only clear statement about the existence of speaking in tongues from 100 to 400 A.D. comes concerning Montanus.

Eusebius tells about Montanus (c.a. 170 A.D.) who "was carried away in spirit, and was wrought up into a certain kind of frenzy and irregular ecstasy, raving, and speaking, and uttering strange things and proclaiming what was contrary to the institutions that had prevailed in the church" (H.E. 5.16). What is so significant about this only clear reference to speaking in tongues during this three century period is that Montanus was

considered a heretic! His heresy was known particularly as a false doctrine in its teachings about the Holy Spirit. Even with all its emphasis on the Spirit and gifts of the Spirit, Montanism's claims and "accomplishments" were far inferior to the true miraculous gifts of the New Testament.³

Besides the silence of Christian writers about speaking in tongues during this long period of time, some specifically refer to the cessation of tongues as Paul the apostle had predicted. Origen (185-254 A.D.), for example, wrote a response to a pagan critic of Christianity by the name of Celsus. Celsus claimed that some Christians were uttering dark, mysterious statements that had no meaning at all, but impostors were misusing for their own purposes. Celsus' accusation was false, but what is important for our study is the reply by Origen. Origen said no real prophets like the authentic ones of Bible times had appeared during his day. He said the Holy Spirit did give signs and outward demonstrations of his presence at the beginning of Christ's ministry and after his ascension, but "these things diminished and are no longer widespread" (Against Celsus 8.8). "What Origen is saying is that no longer are there any of these gifts in operation! Origen does not say the gift of tongues is flourishing at his time, but rather that such gifts have diminished!"⁴

Even plainer is the statement from the great preacher Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.). He wrote a commentary on 1 Corinthians where he confessed that the whole discussion of spiritual gifts was "very obscure." The reason for this obscurity was his "ignorance of the

facts referred to and by their cessation, being such as then used to occur, but now no longer take place" (Homily on 1 Corinthians 29.1). "Here is a clear statement by a well-versed exegete and religious leader of the fourth century stating that tongues are no longer practiced in his day. Far from being the normal occurrence in Christian circles, the gift of tongues is rather unknown! The stature and position of Chrysostom make his testimony extremely important. Evidently, at least by this time, the gift of tongues had died out."⁵ In fact, they had died out so long before that Chrysostom had little idea of what the tongues were.

Based upon this thorough study of church history, we quote from Rogers' conclusion: "After examining the testimony of the early Christian leaders whose ministry represents practically every area of the Roman Empire from approximately A.D. 100 to 400, it appears that the miraculous gifts of the first century died out and were no longer needed to establish Christianity. . . . The only clear reference to anything resembling the phenomena is connected with the heretic Montanus and those influenced by his erroneous views of the Spirit. All of the evidence points to the truth of Paul's prophecy when he says 'tongues shall cease' (1 Cor. 13:8)."⁶

Rogers is not alone in this historical conclusion. Philip Schaff, a widely respected church historian from a century ago, wrote: "The hand of God has drawn a bold line of demarcation between the century of miracles and the succeeding ages, to show, by the abrupt transition and the striking contrast, the difference between the work of God and the work of man, and to impress us the

more deeply with the supernatural origin of Christianity and the incomparable value of the New Testament."⁷ Other authorities could be cited, but these should suffice. A study of history confirms our understanding of the New Testament that miraculous gifts ceased by the end of the first century or soon after at the latest. Contemporary claims of miraculous gifts today have never been verified and are contrary to scriptural principles and the facts of history.

1. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Gift of Tongues in the Post Apostolic Church," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 122 (April 1965): 134.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 141.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 142-43.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 143. For a study with somewhat divergent opinions but much useful material, see Harold Hunter, "Tongues-Speech: A Patristic Analysis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (June 1980): 125-37. For positions in agreement with Rogers' view and the one advocated here, see also Frank Pack, *Tongues and the Holy Spirit* (Abilene, Texas: Biblical Research Press, 1972), pp. 109-15; Jimmy Jividen, *Glossolalia: from God or man?* (Fort Worth: Star Bible Publications, 1971), pp. 62-68; Merrill F. Unger, *New Testament Teaching on*

Tongues (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel, 1971), pp. 135-40; Anthony A. Hoekema, *What About Tongue-Speaking?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1966), pp. 10-18; and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles*, reprint of 1918 edition (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972), pp. 1-31.

7. Cited by J. D. Thomas, "Miracles and Church History," *Gospel Advocate* 11 January 1951, 23.

Chapter 7

WHAT WERE NEW TESTAMENT MIRACLES?

Paul tells the Corinthians that miraculous gifts are going to cease. They are not eternal. It is a very controversial question as to exactly when those gifts were or are going to cease. It is our contention that miracles ceased towards the close of the apostolic age of the church by the end of the first century. If that is true, those who claim miraculous ability today are either self-deceived or deceivers. Many of those who claim miraculous ability today are fakes who are taking advantage of crippled or sick people in order to obtain money. Others who believe in contemporary miracles are sincere. Some of the sincere ones do not really understand what a miracle is, so it essential to carefully define what is meant by a miracle.

Some people define any dramatic event as a miracle. If a person gets well after being very ill, even after taking medicine or having surgery, some people call it a miracle. Some people wrongly believe in contemporary miracles, because they do not understand that Biblical miracles were quite different from most contemporary claims of the miraculous. In this chapter we will deal with reasons why miraculous gifts have ceased by stressing the true nature of New Testament miracles.

Miracles in the Bible were called signs, wonders,

works, or miracles. As a "sign" a miracle pointed beyond itself. The miracle was meant to teach something, primarily the validity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a "wonder" a miracle caused reactions of awe in those who witnessed it. As a "miracle" it was evidence of great power. A miracle was an event of supernatural origin, different from or contrary to the natural order of things.

In order to properly understand miracles in the Bible, we must realize that the chief purpose of miracles was one of confirmation. This is true in Matthew (Mt. 9:4-5; 12:28-29), Mark (Mk. 2:10-11; 16:17-18, 20), Luke (Lk. 5:24), John (Jn. 21:24-25), Acts (Acts 2:32-33), and the epistles (2 Cor. 12:12). This is made very plain by the writer of the letter to the Hebrews: "How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). Miracles were to "accompany" the believers as evidence or proof that their message was true (Mk. 16:17). The ultimate goal of miracles was to produce faith (Jn. 20:30-31).

It is wrongly assumed by many people that miracles were done primarily out of compassion for the sick or hungry. While that was a factor in New Testament miracles, it was secondary. If it was the main reason, why were more miracles not performed? Why was Paul left with a thorn in his flesh? Why was only Lazarus raised from the dead and not the rest of the dead in the cemetery? Why was only one man healed by Jesus at the

pool of Bethesda? Why were more Christians not made able to heal the sick? These questions demonstrate that compassion was not the chief motive for performing miracles. Confirmation of the gospel was the primary purpose of miracles. Once the gospel was confirmed and Jesus was proven to be the Son of God, the primary need for miracles was over and they began to diminish until they ceased.

There is a decline in the miraculous which is evident in the New Testament documents themselves. The greatest number of miracles are found in relation to the ministry of Jesus as recorded in the gospels. In the book of Acts there are many miracles noted, but most of them are in the first half of Acts in the earlier period. In counting general references to miracles, inspiration or direct acts of God, and miracles by the apostles, twenty-eight occurred in the first half of Acts while only nine are found in the second half. Upon going to the epistles, which reflect the history of the church primarily from the latter half of Acts or a period after the close of Acts, there is further decline in the miraculous.¹ Once the message was proven, it did not need continual reconfirmation. As more and more of the New Testament was written, there was less and less a need for miracles. The cessation of miracles was already in process in the New Testament period.

Another important factor in examining the validity of contemporary claims of the miraculous is the contrast between New Testament miracles and pagan wonder workers. In the first century there was no doubt that Jesus and the apostles performed many miracles. Even

the opponents of Jesus had to admit that he performed miracles. Likewise when the apostles went everywhere preaching the word, they occasionally performed miracles. Among the pagans of that day were so-called wonder workers. Some of these men had great reputations.

One of these men, Simon, had amazed a whole nation. People everywhere proclaimed: "This man is that power of God which is called Great" (Acts 8:9-10). But when Philip came to his district and performed real miracles in the name of Jesus, the difference was obvious. Simon's so-called miracles were pathetic tricks or hoaxes compared to what Philip was able to do. Not only the people realized this, but Simon himself admitted it (Acts 8:12-24). Another example was a man named Elymas. He was nothing compared to Paul the apostle (Acts 13:9-10). The pagan wonder workers were able to do nothing compared to the true miracle workers of Jesus.

Some of the differences in pagan wonder workers and apostolic miracles are the following.² First, New Testament miracles did not have to set the mood through drugs, rituals, snakes, or music in order to put people in a trance or otherwise fool them into believing a miracle had occurred. Second, the success rate was different. New Testament miracles had a 100 percent success rate. Pagan miracle workers frequently failed. Their so-called successes can mostly be explained by psychosomatic cures where people were only influenced by the power of suggestion. Third, New Testament miracles did not need the assistance of medicine as did pagan wonder workers. Fourth, New Testament miracles

were done for a different purpose. They were done to confirm the word of God, not for the purpose of making money. As a result New Testament miracles thus have a high believability factor while pagan wonder workers have a very low believability factor.

The point of all of this is that we should not become too excited or concerned about contemporary claims of the miraculous. People claimed to perform miracles among the pagans of the first century, but their claims were false. When those miracles were placed side-by-side with New Testament miracles, it was easy to see which ones were true and which ones were false. Likewise, today, in order to see that contemporary claims to perform miracles are false to the core, one only needs to place these so-called miracles side-by-side with the real miracles of the New Testament. The differences will be obvious.

New Testament miracles were done on people who were obviously sick. Modern fake miracles rarely claim this. New Testament miracles were instantaneous. Modern fake miracles often take days or weeks. New Testament miracles brought about complete cures. Modern fake miracles frequently claim only partial cures. New Testament miracles were done by godly Christians who sought no glory and accepted no money. Modern fake miracles are often done by those who are immoral and who desire glory and money.³ The differences are significant.

There is no valid evidence that miracles are being performed today. The chief purpose for New Testament miracles is not present today. God's word is already

confirmed. Also there are no qualified miracle workers today. The apostles and those upon whom they laid their hands are all dead. There is no authority for miracles today. Finally, there is nothing distinctive about contemporary claims to perform miracles.⁴ They are all similar to the pagan wonder worker claims of the first century and equally as false. Do not be fooled by someone who claims to be able to perform miracles today.

1. Jimmy Jividen, *Miracles: From God or Man?* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1987), pp. 49-65.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-98.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 127-28.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-41.

Chapter 8

CONTEMPORARY CLAIMS OF THE MIRACULOUS

Many people claim the ability to perform miracles today. Many of these people claim to derive this power from Jesus Christ. To question the validity of these claims is a touchy, emotional matter. Those who believe in contemporary miraculous claims are very sensitive about their beliefs. Our purpose in this study is not to offend these people in any way. However, if these miraculous claims are false and unsupported by fact, they should be exposed as such. Even if good people who teach some good things about Jesus or about morality support these miraculous claims, that does not mean the miracles are genuine. There is simply no concrete evidence today that men are able to walk on water, to drink poison without harm, to heal severed ears, or to raise the dead.¹

If contemporary miraculous claims are false, what other explanation is possible for these claims? How should we evaluate contemporary miraculous claims? Part of the problem with contemporary miraculous claims is defining what a real miracle is. Raising someone from the dead is a real miracle. The word "miracle" is used in a very loose sense by many people today, however. A miracle is not something awesome like the wonder of the birth of a child. It is not something

unexpected or out of the ordinary like an underdog athletic team winning a game, a person recovering from cancer, or an accident where no one gets hurt. As unusual as these events are, they do happen. They are not miracles. A miracle is not some unexpected good fortune like getting some money you did not expect or a business success. It is not unexplainable things. Many unexplainable things are explained in time with advances in knowledge, so it is not something of which we are simply ignorant in our present state of knowledge. A miracle is not some sudden euphoria or emotional surge. ²

Many things are called miracles today which are not similar at all to what the New Testament calls a miracle. This loose use of the term "miracle" results in a great deal of confusion. By a miracle we are referring to a supernatural event which goes contrary to the expected laws of nature. Thus a person recovering from cancer is not a miracle. It may not happen frequently, but it does occur. Many people recover from illnesses who have no religious association and make no miraculous claims. Raising someone from the dead, who has been dead for several days, is a miracle, as Jesus did with Lazarus. Some of the contemporary claims of the miraculous are nothing more than a wrong use of terminology.

How else can contemporary claims of the miraculous be explained? Many of these claims are the result of trickery or deceit. In order to obtain money, fame, or power, many unscrupulous people have used trickery to convince others of their ability to perform miracles. Many studies by professional investigators have failed to

uncover a single genuine miracle. Deaths have occurred only a few days after "miraculous healings" supposedly were performed. The healings were reported; the deaths were not! Frequently dishonest tricks have been uncovered. We do not have the time or space to recount various methods of trickery that are used, but one example will suffice.³ Sometimes a person with bad hearing is supposedly healed. First a large watch is placed near the person's ear. The subject is unable to hear the tick-tick noise. After the so-called healing, the watch is again placed close to the person's ear, only this time, unbeknownst to the audience, it is pressed against the bones on the side of the head. The subject still can not hear, but he can feel the vibrations of the ticking watch. He thinks he hears something, and the audience is fooled into thinking a miracle has occurred.

A banker friend of our family was involved in the foreclosure on a loan on which a faith-healing preacher had defaulted several years ago. The bank took possession of a large tent and assorted furnishings like chairs. They also received the fake medical paraphernalia which this faith healer used to fool the simple and unlearned who came to his tent meetings. For example, he had fake casts which snapped on and off so that people could pretend they had a broken arm or leg. These items uncovered a dishonest ministry based on deceit.

Sometimes contemporary claims of miracles are the result of testimony by someone who has been fooled either by trickery or else is confused over what a real miracle is. This confused person tells another person

about the so-called miracle. Stories about the miracle pass from one person to another, growing with each retelling of the event. Soon many people believe a miracle was performed when nothing supernatural ever happened. We should not be surprised that there are claims that miracles are still being performed, but let us not take these claims too seriously.

Finally, many contemporary claims of healing fall into the category of psychosomatic healing, the only type of "faith healing" possible today according to William A. Nolen, M.D. Dr. Nolen, a well-known physician and surgeon, spent a year and a half searching throughout literature and around the world for a true miracle. He investigated the work of Kathryn Kuhlman, Norbu Chen, and some Filipino psychic surgeons. Other lesser known healers were investigated directly or through published reports. How many miraculous cures did he find? He says, "I couldn't find one such case. . . . There were no miracles to be found. . . . After doing my very best for eighteen months to find some shred of evidence that somewhere there was someone who had miraculous healing powers, I concluded that no such person existed."⁴ The only healing power any faith healer has is the power of suggestion which can aid the body to activate its own healing powers.⁵ There is nothing miraculous in aiding the body's own God-given healing functions by hypnotism or suggestion in various forms.

Contemporary claims of the miraculous create several serious implications for Bible truth. People who claim to perform miracles today in the name of Jesus Christ are not to be ignored as merely a curiosity. Their claims

reveal some serious presuppositions. Their claims should not be treated with indifference and apathy. If their claims are true, many other problems are created for the Christian faith.⁶

First, claims to be able to perform miracles today deny the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures. Since miracles were primarily designed to confirm the word, if miracles are still being performed today, then the Scriptures must be incomplete. Among the miracle workers there must be a prophet who is inspired who is writing additional books for the Bible. Realize this is the claim of groups like the Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints). At least they are consistent in their error. Instead we need to realize that the New Testament is complete and all-sufficient for our spiritual needs. The New Testament is "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" in written form (Jude 3). It contains an account of "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3).

Furthermore, in "charismatic theology the Pentecostal experience of tongues has replaced the Scriptures as the norm of Christian doctrine."⁷ Klemet Preus illustrates this conclusion in two ways, both of which are documented thoroughly by him from Pentecostal writers:

1. Charismatics "have an inveterate tendency to reject, on experiential grounds, any exegetical conclusions which conflict with the experience of tongues."
2. "Charismatics elevate the Pentecostal experience above the Scripture" in "their insistence that only

those who have received necessary experience can discover the full meaning of God's Word."⁸

Discussing the Bible or religion with charismatics in a rational, logical exchange is frequently impossible, because they base their decisions upon an emotional reaction to an experience they believe they have had. They may appeal to the Bible in a dramatic fashion, but their theology is a rejection of Bible authority. Preus describes their attitude as "non-cognitive" with a "general indifference toward meaningful theological expression. . . . The test of spirituality [among them] is not faithfulness to the doctrine of God's Word, but the possession of a religious experience."⁹ Unfortunately, the lack of solid Bible teaching in some churches and liberal theology in others has made it easier for multitudes to fall for the theology of Pentecostalism. The rejection of Biblical authority in Pentecostalism in favor of emotionalism is not a problem for one who never accepted Bible authority in the beginning.

Second, contemporary miraculous claims question the uniqueness of Christianity. Many religions, including witchcraft, spiritualism, and the occult, make miraculous claims. How are these contemporary claims so different? Are all of these diverse doctrines thus validated by miraculous claims? One might wonder if Christianity is truly unique, therefore, so-called modern day miracle workers must be rejected.

Third, another problem with contemporary claims of the miraculous is the questionable desire for the miraculous. God frequently expresses disapproval of sign seekers in the pages of the Bible. When there is stress

from war, economic problems, or guilt, many people turn to "miracles" or "signs" in order to gain assurance. This is a psychological or a cultural need that should be fulfilled in legitimate ways, not through seeking miracles (Mt. 12:38-39).

Fourth, contemporary miraculous claims question the nature of God. God is a God of order, not chaos (1 Cor. 14:33). God created the kosmos out of chaos. God is a God of consistency, not contradiction. Various denominational groups in Christendom make miraculous claims. They teach many different doctrines that are contrary to one another. Are all of these conflicting doctrines correct? Is God the author of confusion? The miraculous claims of people today imply untruth about the nature of God, therefore, they must be rejected.

Fifth, contemporary miraculous claims are contradictory to the nature of faith which God planned for the Christian walk. We are to walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). Once the word was confirmed, God wanted the church to proceed from childhood to maturity (1 Cor. 13:8-13). He wanted people to take him at his word, living by faith. Continually seeking signs is not living by faith.

For these reasons, and many more, we reject the claims of charismatics and faith healers today to be able to perform miracles. This does not call into question the power of God. God is still omnipotent or almighty. God is still working in the world through his providence. Christians should still pray and ask God to help them with their problems. We need not pray for miracles, but we can pray that God will aid us through his providence.

Many people are turned off by church creeds or false doctrines. Likewise, false claims to perform miracles, which usually take advantage of poor people or crippled people, are a disgrace. A friend of mine attended a meeting of a "faith healer," better described as a "fake healer." During the service the collection plates were not passed only once for the members to contribute. The collection plates were passed constantly during the whole service. The plate went past my friend six times in less than an hour!

What is needed today is genuine New Testament Christianity which relies upon the New Testament documents, the word of God written, for its evidence and comfort. That is what the churches of Christ preach to you rather than false claims to perform miracles in order to get money from you. Instead, we proclaim to you the primitive, pure gospel of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation. Instead of working fake miracles in order to obtain your money, we proclaim the free gift of God by the blood of Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8-10).

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1. Jimmy Jividen, *Miracles: From God or Man?* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1987), p. 125.
 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 115-17.
 3. Many examples are given in V. E. Howard, *Modern Pretenders Vs. Bible Miracles* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Central Printers and Publishers, n.d.). A dated, but very scholarly, study of patristic and medieval marvels, Roman Catholic miracles, and faith healing is found in Benjamin B. Warfield,

Counterfeit Miracles, reprint of 1918 edition (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972). James Randi, *The Faith Healers* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Healers, 1987), is a scathing expose of many modern faith (fake) healers, including A. A. Allen, W. V. Grant, Peter Popoff, Oral Roberts, and Pat Robertson. A scholarly history of faith healers and the charismatic revival from 1947 to 1974 is found in David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *All Things Are Possible: The Healing & Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975).

4. William A. Nolen, *Healing: A Doctor in Search of a Miracle* (New York: Random House, 1974), pp. 265, 268.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 265-308.
6. Jividen, *Miracles*, pp. 143-54.
7. Klemet Preus, "Tongues: An Evaluation from a Scientific Perspective." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 46 (October 1982): 278.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 278-80.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 288.

WHEN THE PERFECT COMES

"For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood" (1 Cor. 13:9-12).

Paul says that (inspired) knowledge and prophecy will pass away when the perfect comes. By implication one may assume that all spiritual gifts would cease when the perfect comes.¹ What is the perfect? Several views are usually suggested.

- 1. The second coming of Christ, the perfect one.**
- 2. The perfect state of heaven.**
- 3. The completion of the perfect word of God written.**
- 4. The maturation of the church to work without the aid of miracles, but by the guidance of the written word.**

It should be evident that the first two of these can be combined, and the latter two can be combined. It is our contention that the latter two are the correct description of what the perfect of 1 Corinthians 13:10 is. If Paul had

wanted to describe the second coming of Jesus Christ, he could have used much plainer words than saying "when the perfect comes." Also, "perfect" is in the neuter gender. It would be more logical for it to be in the masculine gender if it referred to Jesus Christ.²

The Greek word for "perfect" means "brought to its end, finished, wanting nothing necessary to completeness, perfect, full-grown, adult, of full age, mature."³ The original Greek word does not mean sinless or faultless as the English term "perfect" may imply. Since it is used in contrast to the partial, the meaning of whole, complete, or mature fits the context better. Thus the NRSV translates with "complete" instead of "perfect." In this sense it is easy to equate the coming of the perfect with two definite gradual developments in the church in the first century, namely, the gradual revelation of the word of God and the growth and development of the church.⁴ The word was gradually transferred from human vessels to written form (2 Cor. 4:7; Jude 3). Likewise, the church grew in maturity, not in deeper zeal or spirituality, but in its ability to carry on its mission without recourse to miracles. It grew out of childhood toward manhood (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Cor. 13:11).

Thus R. L. Roberts, professor of Bible at Abilene Christian University, concludes, "The gifts of the Spirit were to last only until the church developed unto 'perfect manhood' as opposed to 'childhood' and that there were to be no miraculously endowed people after this event. That is why the apostles and prophets had no successors in the church and the reason that there are none today.

There is no need for them today and there is no need for spiritual gifts today.”⁵

The same conclusion was reached by the well known Bible scholar, W. E. Vines: “There is no evidence of the continuance of this gift after apostolic times nor indeed in the later times of the apostles themselves; this provides confirmation of the fulfillment in this way of 1 Corinthians 13:8, that this gift would cease in the churches, just as would ‘prophecies’ and ‘knowledge’ in the sense of knowledge received by immediate supernatural power (cp. 14:6). The completion of the Holy Scriptures has provided the church with all that is necessary for individual and collective guidance, instruction, and edification.”⁶

The interpretation of “perfect” as the maturation of the church and the completion of the New Testament has been rejected by many interpreters, however. When Paul says, “Now we see indistinctly in a mirror; but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12), many assume this implies the second coming of Christ. They contend that miracles will continue until Christ comes again when we can see him “face to face.” On the surface that sounds good, but careful study should lead to another conclusion.⁷ The contrast is between imperfect knowledge or understanding and a more complete knowledge. To see “indistinctly in a mirror” refers to imperfect knowledge, because mirrors in the first century were well known for their poor quality. By contrast “face to face” does not mean seeing God or Christ “face to face.” Nothing in the verse or the context states that Paul means we will see God’s face or Christ’s face.

A careful word study on this passage by Emanuel Miguens led him to the conclusion that "face to face" refers simply to seeing the truth in a deeper and better way and has nothing to do with being in heaven at the end of time. This interpretation makes "face to face" correspond with the seeing "indistinctly in a mirror" in a true analogy. Miguens states that when Paul refers to seeing "face to face, he does not speak about a vision of God directly and immediately" as anticipated in the next life or heaven. Instead Paul refers to the Christian seeing or "understanding of the Christian faith or mysteries."⁸ Why is the wording not more specific? Why is the somewhat vague term "perfect" used by Paul? There is a simple explanation.

Paul refers to two states, one of childhood and one of maturity, one of incompleteness and one of completeness, one of knowing in part and one of knowing fully. From Paul's vantage point the transition from one state to the other might have been at the second coming of Christ, because Paul did not know when the second coming of Christ was. However, "if the Lord chose to delay His return, the process of revelation might reach its culmination prior to the [second coming]. To Paul it was not revealed which of the two states would come first. So he under divine inspiration carefully chose vocabulary and illustrations that would allow for either possibility."⁹ As it has turned out in history, the Lord did delay his second coming long enough for the scriptures to be completed in what we call the New Testament. In the New Testament we have the complete revelation of God in written form, so we do not know in

part any longer. The church could move from childhood (depending upon miracles) to maturity or perfection (standing by faith in the written word).

In the New Testament records there is a continual diminishing of miracles. The miracles are most common in the life of Jesus. After this the early part of Acts reveals the most miracles. The further you go in Acts, the fewer miracles you find. In the later history of the church as known from bits and pieces revealed in the epistles, miracles continued to decline. At the exact same time as miracles were decreasing in frequency, more and more of the New Testament was being put in written form, and the church was maturing to less and less of a need for miracles for confirmation. This demonstrates that as the New Testament was completed, the miraculous age was drawing to a close.¹⁰ The maturation of the church, an integral part of which was the writing of the Scriptures, was being completed as miracles were ceasing. The miracles had served their purpose of authenticating the word, so they began to diminish until they ceased. So in conclusion we note that miracles ceased when the perfect came. When was this? We do not know exactly. It was a gradual process rather than a precise moment. The most likely end date would be around 100 A.D., if they had not already ceased long before then.

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1. Some interpreters contend that the gift of tongues was to cease even before the gift of knowledge and prophecy. They make this argument based upon verb tenses and because all three gifts are mentioned in 1

Corinthians 13:8 while only the latter two are found in 1 Corinthians 13:9. While this is possible, this view may be reading too much into the text. From several different lines of reasoning we know that all miraculous spiritual gifts ceased in the first century. At this distant date it matters only a little whether they ceased at the same time. Neither does it matter exactly when in the first century they ceased. The point is that they ceased, and men cannot work miracles or speak in tongues today.

2. R. L. Roberts, "That Which Is Perfect' — 1 Cor. 13:10," *Restoration Quarterly* 3, no. 4 (1959): 201.
3. Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, reprint edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1962), p. 618.
4. Roberts, "That Which Is Perfect," p. 199.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
6. Cited by Roy H. Lanier, "Believers and Miracles (2)," *Firm Foundation* 95 (14 February 1978): 9.
7. For more evidence that the "perfect" cannot refer to the second coming of Christ, see the chart in the last chapter.
8. Emanuel Miguens, "1 Cor 13:8-13 Reconsidered," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37 (January 1975): 87; cf. Gary W. Workman, "When That Which Is Perfect Is Come," in *Studies in I Corinthians*, ed. by Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1982), pp. 175-76.

9. Robert L. Thomas, "Tongues . . . Will Cease," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17 (Spring 1974): 88.
10. Ibid.

Chapter 10

THE APOSTLES AND MIRACLES

In these studies it has been argued that miraculous signs ceased in the first century when the "perfect" came. There is other evidence in the New Testament that corroborates the argument from 1 Corinthians 13. Basically there are two other lines of evidence:

1. The purpose of miracles had been fulfilled.
2. The apostles and those upon whom the apostles laid hands had died.

Let us briefly examine these two arguments.

The first argument deals with the purpose of miracles. The purpose of New Testament miracles was not primarily to alleviate physical suffering. The purpose of miracles was primarily to be a sign and an evidence to confirm the word of God. The gospel was "declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will" (Heb. 2:3-4). Jesus performed many signs, and they were done and recorded so that we might believe (Jn. 20:30-31; cf. Mk. 16:17-18). If God had intended for miracles to be repeated in every generation, there would be no need for signs and wonders to be written down that later readers might believe.

Once a truth is tested and proven, if adequate proof has been offered, the evidence does not have to be produced over and over again. The initial evidence can simply be examined again to reconfirm the former decision. In a similar way once the person of Jesus Christ was validated by his miracles and by his resurrection from the dead, miracles were not needed again and again to prove that point (Rom. 1:4). Jesus had to rise from the dead only once. His resurrection has been proven. It stands as a historical fact. That evidence is now recorded in a document, the Bible. It is only necessary for us to examine that document, believe, and obey. The same is true for other miracles which confirmed or validated the preaching and ministry of the early church. Miracles served their purpose during the first century, so they diminished and ceased.

The second argument which demonstrates that miracles have ceased is that the apostles and those upon whom the apostles laid their hands have died. The significance of this is evident after a study of the New Testament, especially the book of Acts. Before Jesus ascended to his father in heaven, he told the apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came upon them with power (Acts 1:1-5). This occurred in Acts 2. The apostles were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4, 14). They were empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak in tongues.

Later in the book of Acts we read of men like Philip who were "full of the Spirit" (Acts 6:3-5). Philip was able to perform miracles and signs like the apostles (Acts 8:6, 13). One might assume that Philip, who was not an

apostle, possessed the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the apostles did. There was a significant difference, however. The apostles had the ability to transfer miraculous gifts to other Christians through the laying on of hands. Philip did not have that power. Philip converted people in Samaria and performed miracles there, but he was unable to give the Holy Spirit to these new Christians. It was necessary for apostles to come from Jerusalem and lay "their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit" (Acts 8:17). My assumption here is that receiving the Holy Spirit meant to receive miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, because the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a person is received by all Christians at baptism (Acts 2:38).

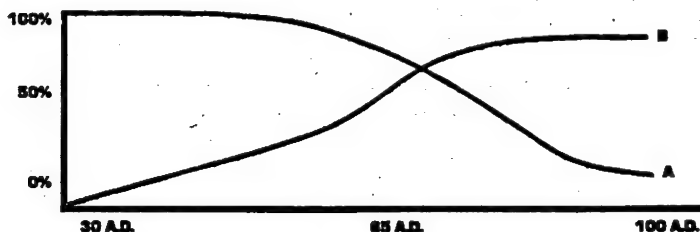
There was a special significance to the apostles being baptized in the Holy Spirit. The same power apparently was granted to Paul also (2 Tim. 1:6).¹ True apostles were able to perform signs, wonders, and miracles (2 Cor. 12:12). The term "apostle" simply meant "one who was sent." In a loose sense it could refer to what we would call a missionary today, but there was a narrower sense in the New Testament where apostle included only the original twelve and eventually Paul (Acts 1:16-26; 1 Cor. 15:8-10). This special group could not only perform miracles, but they could give that power to others through the laying on of hands. The latter recipients of miraculous power, like Philip, were unable to transfer miraculous power to others.

There is one other case of a reception of the Holy Spirit which is compared to what the apostles received. The Holy Spirit fell on the household of Cornelius just as

it fell on the apostles at the beginning (Acts 11:15). Cornelius and his household were enabled to speak in tongues (Acts 10:46). This was done in order to teach the early church that Gentiles were to be admitted without becoming Jewish proselytes (Acts 10:9-16, 34-35, 47; 11:17-18). This was done for a special purpose, and there is no implication or indication of any sort that Cornelius and his household were to be ranked on the same level as the apostles. There is no indication that they possessed any other miraculous gifts besides tongues or that they were able to transfer gifts to others.

Once the apostles died and once those upon whom they laid their hands died, miracles ceased. This would place the absolute extreme limit for miracles early in the second century. Since miracles were concentrated in the ministry of Jesus and the early ministry of the apostles, they likely ceased long before that time.² Miracles are not to continue throughout the church age any more than apostles. The apostles continue their function through their witness in the written word. The same is true for miracles. Miracles still perform their value of evidence by their record within God's written word.

The following chart should help explain how certain one can be that miracles ceased in the first century.



Line A refers to the diminishing occurrence of miracles in the New Testament era. Exactly how quickly this happened and when it ceased is not certain. Line B can represent several truths which together combine to provide a cumulative certainty that miracles ceased in the first century. Line B represents the following:

1. the transfer of God's inspired message from human vessels to a book, the Bible;
2. the death of the apostles, the only men able to impart the power to perform miracles to Christians through the laying on of hands;
3. the death of those upon whom the apostles had laid their hands;
4. the accomplishment by miracles of their task of confirming the gospel message;
5. the maturing of the church to a point where miracles were not needed by the church to fulfill its mission.

All of these could be accomplished by about 100 A.D. or soon thereafter, so this is why we contend that miracles ceased by that point in time, possibly earlier.

The contention that miraculous gifts ceased in the first century is not based upon a fragile, weak interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13. The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13 offered in this study, while not unanimously held, is widely held among Bible students. It is confirmed by several other lines of evidence from the New Testament and history. One should not be

fooled by claims of the ability to perform miracles in the name of Jesus Christ in this post-apostolic era.

1. Note the different prepositions used in 2 Timothy 1:6 (dia meaning "through" or "by means of") and in 1 Tim. 4:14 (meta meaning "with," "accompanying," or at the same time). The elders laid hands on Timothy at the same time as Paul. Paul is the one through whom Timothy was given any miraculous gifts. The elders did not have that apostolic power. They merely approved of the appointing of Timothy to preach the gospel by laying their hands on him at the same time as Paul. Most commentators are in agreement that the "gift" of 1 Timothy 4:14 is the appointment to preach and not a miraculous gift, and the context seems to indicate this quite clearly (1 Tim. 4:13, 15-16; cf. Col. 4:17). The "prophetic utterance" could have been delivered by Paul or possibly by one of the elders, but it does not define the gift Timothy received. Any miraculous gift given to Timothy by Paul may have been given on another occasion. See also Acts 19:6.
2. There is some extra-biblical evidence that miraculous ability was already ceasing during the lives of the apostles. How reliable some of this information is is not easy to determine. It is possible that Thomas went to India and was unable to speak in tongues there. Mark is frequently called the "interpreter" of Peter during Peter's last years (Eusebius, H.E. 3.39, quoting Papias; the Anti-Marcionite Prologue; and Irenaeus, Against Heresies

3.1.2). If this means interpreter in the sense of a translator, Peter may have ceased to be able to speak in tongues during his lifetime.

THE ERRORS OF THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

The charismatic movement and various types of Pentecostal religious groups are on the increase throughout the world, in particular in third world countries. Predictions are that in a few years they will outnumber all other Protestant groups combined! While we should rejoice that the name of Jesus is becoming known through their widespread activity and be thankful for their many good deeds (Phil. 1:15-18), it is sad that errors related to miraculous gifts are promulgated by them. Thomas R. Edgar, a professor of New Testament literature and exegesis, has recently written a scholarly refutation of charismatic claims. This chapter is a review and digest of Edgar's work, since it is a very useful summary of the charismatic problem and how to respond to it.¹

The charismatic claim is a serious one. "These so-called 'spiritual' experiences are either from God or not from God. There can be no neutral or partially true position. Either they are biblically true or they are false experiences. . . . By the very nature of the issue, the 'gifts' such as tongues, healings, and signs and wonders, so prevalent in today's charismatic movement, are either from God or not from God. There can be no middle ground."

First, can the Pentecostal claim be bolstered by an appeal to history? If miraculous gifts did not cease with the close of the apostolic age of the church in the first century, one would expect an unbroken chain of such gifts throughout the past 1,900 years. The burden of proof is on the charismatics to demonstrate the continuation of spiritual gifts in order to validate their current claims. The evidence of history, however, is that "the miraculous gifts of the New Testament age did cease and did not occur for almost 1,900 years of church history and certainly have not continued in an unbroken line. . . . Chrysostom, a fourth-century theologian, testified that they had ceased so long before his time that no one was certain of their characteristics."

There are a few alleged instances after the apostolic age and then a gap of 1,000 years before more alleged instances occur. "The alleged instances are even more rare if restricted to genuine believers, and if hearsay evidence is omitted. If instances of the gift of healing rather than supposed answers to prayer are considered, the alleged instances all but vanish." The fact that miraculous gifts ceased and are absent for centuries is now admitted by many charismatics.

Many charismatics admit the cessation of miraculous gifts but claim they were predicted to return in these "latter days." "There is no biblical evidence that there will be a reoccurrence in the church of the sign gifts or that believers will work miracles near the end of the Church Age. . . . The 'latter rain' arguments are incorrectly based on verses that actually are referring to seasonal rainfall in Israel [Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23]. . . . The

arguments based on the expression 'in the last days' in Acts 2:16-21 are also invalid." The "last days" included Pentecost (Acts 2:16), thus, they can not refer to the end of the church age.

"The present charismatic movement is characterized by phenomena that began in the church about 100 years ago, which apart from any historical connection or evidence are claimed to be the same as the miracles performed in the apostolic age. It is simply naive to accept this claim without some direct historical link or solid biblical evidence that these present phenomena are the same as those in the days of the apostles. . . . History testifies to the contrary. The gifts ceased and there is no reason to expect their presence or reoccurrence today."

Second, charismatic claims are shown to be false because of a lack of similarity between current "miracles" and "signs" and those of the New Testament. "The miracles and signs of the apostolic age were clearly and overtly miraculous. Even the opponents of the gospel could not refute the miracles of the apostolic age. But today's 'signs and wonders' cannot be verified even by those who are neutral or friendly to the movement." Pentecostal claims can be dealt with under four headings.

1. The gift of healing. "Today's healers admittedly often fail. . . . The alleged healings are seldom instantaneous or complete. They usually are not healings of objectively verifiable illnesses; they often pertain to internal disorders such as 'emotional healing.' Rather than being irrefutable, they are unverified or even denied by those neutral. . . . There is little

correspondence between modern-day charismatic 'healings' and the healings recorded in the New Testament. . . . No one heals today in such a way that it is clearly the New Testament gift of healing."

2. Exorcism of demons. Demon possession in the New Testament was not a vague way to refer to emotional problems. While someone today may refer to the "demon of worry" or the "demon of alcohol," that is not the same as the New Testament problem of demonism. "The New Testament instances of exorcism never failed, were without preliminaries, were instantaneous, were usually performed in public, often en masse, usually on unbelievers, and in the case of the mantic girl (Acts 16:16-18) apart from any cooperation of the demonized. Today's 'exorcisms' often fail, often require repeated sessions, are usually unverified as demonism, and are never en masse, seldom if ever occur in public, are only on the cooperative 'faithful.'" So-called modern exorcism usually amounts to little more than "common psychiatric or religious counseling sessions."

3. Raising the dead. "No modern-day 'raising of the dead' has been verified. Wimber refers to a man who fell, hit his head, was apparently unconscious for three minutes, and 'came to' with a bump on his head. After Wimber and others prayed the bump eventually went away. This is incredible, not as a miracle, but that anyone would consider this a possible raising of the dead. Would anyone have been convinced by such a [so-called] 'miracle' that Jesus was the Son of God or that the apostles represented God?"

4. The gift of tongues. "The tongues of the apostolic

age were genuine miracles, since they were the ability to speak previously unlearned foreign languages, rather than the 'charismatic tongues' of today, which can easily be duplicated [Acts 2:4-11]. . . . New Testament tongues were verifiable foreign languages. The term glossa means language and is never used for ecstatic speech. By contrast, today's 'tongues' have never been verified as actual languages. All objective studies by impartial linguists indicate that they do not have the characteristics common to languages. . . . There is no similarity between today's tongues and the New Testament gift."

"The 'charismatic gifts' of today are not similar to the New Testament phenomena either in general perspective or in the details. There is no evidence to conclude that they are the same; there is every reason to conclude that they are not. . . . All objective evidence is contrary to the charismatic claims. It is not sufficient to assert that by faith their claims must be taken contrary to the evidence. This is existential naivete, not faith. Faith is trust in biblical evidence rather than in experience."

Third, Edgar reviews biblical evidence for the cessation of miraculous gifts. "There are several indications in the Scriptures that the gifts of tongues, healing, and miracles (signs and wonders) will not continue." Apostleship, in the narrow sense of the twelve plus Paul, who had seen the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22-26; 1 Cor. 9:1-2), did not continue beyond the New Testament era. The gift of apostleship is at least one example of a gift that was not to continue beyond the

first century. "It is contrary to Scripture to assume that all gifts and all happenings of the apostolic church are to continue and to be expected in today's church." The miracles were "intended by God as evidence to authenticate the apostles' preaching" and "ceased with the apostolic age."

Fourth, certain characteristics of the modern charismatic movement refute their claims. The fact that so-called healings and miracles are performed by divergent groups teaching contradictory doctrines, including non-Christian religions like Buddhism and Hinduism and sects such as Mormonism, demonstrate that these gifts must not be from God or else the Holy Spirit would show some concern for correcting crucial differences. A common characteristic of the charismatic movement is the emphasis on experience which "often results in emphasizing 'experience' over Scripture." The so-called miraculous gifts of charismatics "have not produced any genuine spiritual advance over noncharismatics," because theological and moral problems among their leaders and laymen are common. They have produced no new divine revelations or advances in spiritual living.

"This movement has solved no theological issue, produced no advance in biblical knowledge, and has not produced more spiritual Christians. Would such an effusion of the genuine Spirit of God produce so little? . . . On the negative side the movement has split churches, and through its televangelists [in the U.S.A.] the movement has had one of the most significant negative impacts on the testimony of the church in recent history.

These characteristics are evidence that the charismatic phenomena are not the New Testament phenomena, that the genuine gifts are not present."

In summary Edgar has given four reasons for rejected modern charismatic claims:

- 1. History demonstrates that miraculous gifts ceased with the apostolic age.**
- 2. Modern miraculous claims lack similarity to the genuine New Testament miraculous gifts.**
- 3. The Bible affirms the cessation of miraculous gifts.**
- 4. Contradictory and negative characteristics of the charismatic movement demonstrate it is not of God.**

These four arguments well summarize the evidence that modern so-called miraculous gifts of charismatics are not of God; not authorized by the Bible, and should not be engaged in by those who desire to be pleasing to God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

1. Thomas R. Edgar, "The Cessation of the Sign Gifts," Bibliotheca Sacra 145 (October-December 1988): 371-86. All quotations in this lesson are from this excellent article by Edgar.

Chapter 12

THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE

"So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

During the early days of World War II, a Jewish rabbi was lecturing to a group of Christian students. His topic was supposed to be the atrocities the Jewish people were suffering at the hands of the Nazis. As the hour wore on, the audience became aware that he was going to say very little about his assigned topic. Instead he directed their attention to three things the world needed. If these three things were present, he claimed the world would not witness atrocities such as the holocaust where millions of Jews were killed by the Nazis.

Although the rabbi was certainly unaware of it, his three things that the world needed were very similar to what Paul the apostle stated as the supreme virtues almost 2,000 years ago. First, this rabbi said the world needed a critical mind, that is, the world needed a point of reference, a norm, or a standard for right and wrong. Long ago Paul the apostle said we need faith. It is through our faith in God that we obtain a standard, a point of reference, or an absolute indicator of right and wrong. "The faith," that is, the gospel, the Christian faith, the truth, is that standard the world needs. Second, the rabbi said the world needed a merciful

heart. Likewise, Paul said the world needed love, which would include a merciful heart and many more things. Third, the rabbi said the world needed an optimistic outlook.¹ Paul said the world needed hope, which is the same thing. As the inspired Paul put it: "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13).

Faith, hope, and love are the three qualities that man needs now, in the present. In the next life in heaven, faith will melt away in the sense that we now walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:7). We will still trust in God, but we will be in the presence of God. Hope will be realized as our hopes and expectations are fulfilled in heaven (Rom. 8:24-25). Therefore, love is the eternal one of this trilogy of virtues.

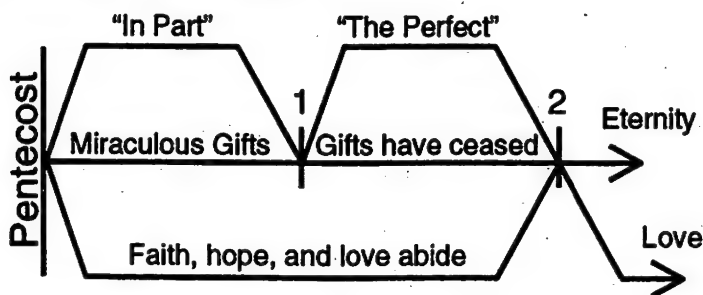
In contrast to the temporary spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues, which passed away by the end of the first century, faith, hope, and love endure and abide. They are present throughout the Christian age. Love is the greatest of these three in that it abides eternally. While Paul did not know when the second coming of Christ would be, whether or not it would come before the spiritual gifts completely passed away, we now know that Christ has delayed his coming past that point. So three periods of time are possible based upon Paul's careful use of words and based upon our knowledge of history since the first century.² They are:

1. the period when miraculous gifts would abide;
2. the period when miraculous gifts would cease, but faith, hope, and love would abide;

3. the period when faith ends in sight and hope in fruition, but the greatest virtue, love, abides eternally.

The first two periods are divided by the completion of the New Testament Scriptures and the maturing of the church where it could rely on the written word rather than on the inspired word in men. This would be a period of time by the end of the first century. This occurred as a process. As the church matured, as miracles were no longer needed for confirmation of the word, and as the canon was completed, the frequency of miracles diminished. The second and third period will be divided in the future by the second coming of Christ. Therefore, the "perfect" or the "complete" of 1 Corinthians 13:8 does not refer to the second coming of Christ, but to a period of maturation in the life of the church based upon their possession of the complete written word.

The following chart³ will illustrate Paul's line of thought in 1 Corinthians 13:



At point 1 on the chart, the perfect comes and the

miraculous gifts cease. At point 2 Jesus Christ returns for the final judgment day. Clearly the second coming of Christ cannot be the "perfect" (1 Cor. 13:8). The coming of the perfect already occurred in the first century. This means that Christians no longer possess the ability to perform miracles.

This interpretation is to be favored also, because it allows for a more natural translation of 1 Corinthians 13:13. Paul says, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three" (1 Cor. 13:13). His point is that in contrast to the temporary spiritual gifts, faith, hope, and love abide, remain, or continue to exist. When the miraculous gifts have ceased, these three virtues will remain. Of these three love is the greatest, because love will abide and remain past the second coming of Christ when faith and hope cease. The superiority of love over faith and hope is explained in temporal terms in this passage.⁴ To summarize briefly, miraculous gifts are temporary and will cease when the perfect comes, but faith, hope, and love will abide past that point. Love is the greatest of these, because it will abide eternally.

This verse brings to a close our study of Paul's great chapter on love. Paul sets a very high standard for Christians in his discussion of Christian love. A Brahman, upon hearing 1 Corinthians read, once asked: "Who can live up to that?" It is not easy. With men alone, it is impossible, but with God's grace and assistance, it is possible for Christians to strive after pure love. God loves perfectly and completely. That is why the Bible says, "God is love" (1 Jn. 4:8). In fact, an interesting way to read 1 Corinthians 13 is to substitute

the word "God" for the word "love." Making that word change, the passage reads like this:

God is patient and kind; God is not jealous or boastful; God is not arrogant or rude. God does not insist on his own way; he is not irritable or resentful; God does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

God's love is great enough to love the whole world. Just as love is perfectly realized in God, perfect love is also found in Jesus Christ the Son of God. When Paul the apostle tells us how to love, the goal he holds before us is the perfect love of Christ. He says, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:2). As Christians we are called to live a life of love. Love is the "new" commandment from Jesus, and what makes it new is the measure of love he asks of us. He tells us to "love one another; even as I have loved you" (Jn. 13:35). We call upon every one of you to strive every day to walk in love, to love the Lord your God completely, and to love your neighbor as yourself (Mt. 22:36-40).

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1. John Wick Bowman, "The Three Imperishables," *Interpretation* 13 (October 1959): 433-43.
 2. For a similar chart see Robert L. Thomas, "Tongues... Will Cease," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17 (Spring 1974): 88-89.
 3. This chart is from Roy H. Lanier, "Believers and

Miracles (3)." Firm Foundation 95 (21 February 1978): 9.

4. This point is explained along with other weaknesses of the second coming view in Thomas, "Tongues Will Cease," pp. 83-85.

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